



The Auburn Circle

Fall 2011



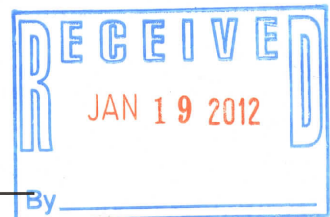
How to Submit

We want your art, interior design, graphic design, poetry, photography, fiction, non-fiction, fashion, architecture, comics, political thoughts, and anything else that's entertaining.

To submit your work, download a waiver from our new website (wp.auburn.edu/circle), fill it out, and turn it into our office in room 1115 of the New Student Center.

To submit art, photography, fashion, architecture, or design:
send a digital file of at least 300 dpi, saved as a JPEG, to theaucircle@gmail.com.

To submit anything in text:
send a word document to theaucircle@gmail.com and submit a hard copy to our office (New Student Center room 1115).



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the auburn circle

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On the Plains

Upcoming Events in the Auburn Area

Auburn Connects!

The Common Book Program:

The Art at the Threshold Series will sponsor a screening of the film *Of Men and Gods* by anthropologist Anne Lescot on January 1st at 4:00 p.m. The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts will host an ekphrastic poetry reading by Pulitzer Prize winner Natasha Tretheway on January 19th at 5:00 p.m.

February 2nd is the submission deadline for Auburn Connects! Spring Semester Writing Contest.

The Making Connections Series will hold the panel, "*From Freedom Fighters to Nomads: Haiti's Revolution in World Literature*," with Drs. Traci O'Brien, Alex Holland, and Adrienne Angelo on February 9th from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. in Haley Center 1435.

The Art at the Threshold Series will sponsor the lecture, "Political and Religious Aspects of Ritual Violence among the Postclassic Maya in Northern Guatemala (AD 950-1524)," with Dr. William Duncan on February 14th at 4:00 p.m.

Dr. Mark Miller Graham will hold the lecture, "Tina Modotti: Muse, Photographer, Revolutionary," on March 20th at 4:00 p.m.

Tracy Kidder, author of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, will speak in the Auburn

University Arena on April 2nd at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Suzanne Preston Blier of Harvard University will hold the lecture, "Art Matters: Sculpture, Peace, and Diplomacy in Ancient Yoruba" on April 17th at 4:00 p.m.

Caroline Marshall Draughton Center for the Arts and Humanities:

The Caroline Marshall Draughton Center for the Arts and Humanities will hold the Engaged Scholar Speaker Series, featuring Angela Burque and Braveheart, on February 8th at 5:30 p.m. in The Gnu's Room.

The Caroline Marshall Draughton Center for the Arts and Humanities will hold a Public History Conference in the RBD library from February 17th to 18th.

The Caroline Marshall Draughton Center for the Arts and Humanities will hold the workshop, "How to Showcase Community and Civic Engagement in Your CV," on March 20th from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. in Tichenor Hall 310.

Auburn University Academic Research Week will be held April 2nd to 4th.

The Caroline Marshall Draughton Center for the Arts and Humanities will hold the Engaged Scholar Speaker Series, featuring Brigitta Brun-

ner and Carole Zugazaga, on April 12th at 5:30 p.m. in The Gnu's Room.

The Gnu's Room:

The Gnu's Room will hold Expression Café, an open mic opportunity for poets, creative writers and musicians, on the first Friday of every month at 7:00 p.m.

Department of English:

The English Department, the Stevens Fund, and Women's Studies will be sponsoring a Research Culture Lecture by Kristina Straub, professor of Literary and Cultural Studies, on February 20th from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the AU Hotel and Conference Center.

The College of Liberal Arts Faculty Awards and Reception Ceremony will be held at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts on March 29th from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.

College of Liberal Arts:

Carter Foster will present *Drawing on Alabama 2011*, an exhibition of Alabama artists and Juror's Talk on January 14th at 5:00 p.m. in Biggin Hall 005.

The Music Department will host a recital for cello artist, Laura Usiskin on January 14th from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. in Goodwin Music Building Recital Hall.

The Music Department will hold MTNA International Day of Collaborative Music Recital on January 22nd from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. in the Goodwin Music Building Recital Hall.

Auburn University Theatre:

The Auburn University Theatre will perform the musical *Cabaret*, directed by Chase Bringardner, from February 23rd to 25th and February 28th to March 3rd at 7:30 p.m. The Auburn University Theatre will perform *Sylvia*, directed

by department chair Scott Phillips, from April 12th to 14th and 17th to 20th at 7:30 p.m.

The Auburn University Theatre will perform *Auburn Pops!*, directed by Joseph Bates, on April 27th at 7:30 p.m.

Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts:

The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts will exhibit *In the Background: Flora in J.J. Audubon's The Birds of America* from January 28th to May 19th.

The Jule Collins Smith Museum will exhibit *Auburn Collects: Selections from the Ed Hayes Collection* from February 4th to April 28th.

The Jule Collins Smith Museum will exhibit *Auburn University Department of Art Studio Faculty Exhibition* from March 24th to May 19th.

Other:

January 9th is the submission deadline for the undergraduate research journal, *Papers and Publications*.



Alaskan Dusk in June by Haley Bridges

11,248 Ways to Put a Finger on Death

In my first encounter,
some paramedics traded
me a cheap teddy bear,
that felt like fiberglass
snuggled on my skin,
for Daddy Nick
in a body bag
in the trunk
of their white van.

Mom said he'd gone
to be with our Lord;
that I should be happy
he was in paradise now,
but not to wear my pink
polka dot dress to the service.

Granny went to Walmart
and bought a new suit
for Daddy Nick,
so he'd smell like factory glue
instead of mothballs. We sang
"I'll Fly Away" and I pretended
to know the words.
My cousin climbed
and laid in his casket
at the viewing
and the women boo-
hooed a little louder,
on cue.

But that was just
my meet-and-greet
with death and I was only
four. In order to understand it,
I'd need it redefined
11,248 times over:

the death of our carrot-
colored dog, Sleeper;
the death of his insistence
on touring the neighborhood
every time the gate
opened.

the death of that uncle
that never came to Thanksgiving;
the death of his rumored
Klan membership.



Conversation by Emily Quinn

the Black Death;
Adolf's suicide;
programmed cell death;
four dead in the 16th Street Church;
the assassination of JFK;
the *Death of the Virgin*;
the *Death of a Salesman*;
etc., etc.

and, even just now:
the death of a fudgesicle;
the death of my appetite;
the ruthless slaughter
of a blank word document—
So, yeah, I get it.

Who knows,
maybe I'll smoke
me up some lung cancer
and get real scared and
religious, only to find
an afterlife as fertilizer.
Or, maybe, I'll just join
the other stubborn
assholes that lived
to burn.

But who can say
I won't be the pollen
or dust on a blue jay's wings?
and, "when I die,
Hallelujah, by and by,
I'll fly away."

—April Nelson
The Auburn Circle Fall 2011

Finding Angels

Nick Brown

Fiction

The Present

An angel is a child with a disproportionally large blonde head for his body, and disproportionally large blue eyes within that head. He's on his knees, praying and looking skyward in a pastel, blue robe. I love my mom, but I hate who she is. The angel figurine feels smooth as I pass my hand around the blunted edges. The surface feels like chalk and I push my fingernail into the angel's robe, leaving a small cut, before putting it back in its place along the wooden cabinet, reuniting him with scores of other "divine," fragile babies. There are babies with wings playing the harp, riding on cloud seesaws, singing in choirs, baby girls with wings jumping rope, others skipping, playing hopscotch, and hundreds more smashed into this cabinet and placed throughout the house at every shady corner, on every windowsill, over every dark nook and cranny. Dad's dead. Has been dead for a while. And as his body has rotted, so has this house.

Over the living room is a bowl covering the light bulbs, which has dirt speckled on it and such a thick layer of dust inside the bowl that the only light that can come through is a weary yellow. Everything reeks with the sour smell of mildew, which I can only

smell if I'm out of the house for long periods of time and my nose has had time to forget. That's why I spend as much time as possible outside of the house; I don't want to get used to it. Mom doesn't even know that it stinks.

The living room looks like the Red Sea after the waves have crashed back together on the Egyptians. At one time there were only one or two boxes, but they slowly piled up on either side in tall towers with a path between, but Mom kept buying and adding more figurines, more boxes of paperwork, more figurines, more clothes, more figurines, more lamps, more figurines, more junk, more junk, and more junk, piling higher and higher until, one day, the waves crashed into each other, overflowing the living room and flooding into the rest of the house. Mom has kept buying and packed the house so tightly that the walls groan. The only way to get out of the living room is to jump on the couch and walk across the cushions like a balance beam, then stand on the armrest and jump onto a box of stuffed animals Mom had bought from a garage sale for \$1.50, the price sketched in black marker. I've heard that we discern right from wrong by watching our parents.

I open the door and almost fall over as the box underneath my feet slides backwards from my forward momentum, but I grab the doorknob and steady myself as I finally make it out of the house. My mother's a good, gentle, naive person. It's raining and the droplets tick against my red 1988 Ford truck. Jumping in the driver's seat, I stretch my arms out and back out of the driveway, four angel figurines staring at me with goo-goo eyed love from the other side of the living room window. I love my mom and don't want to be anything like her.

Every morning I drive out to the Jefferson High School parking lot and park in the very front row, closest to the road. I've been out of school for a couple of years, but I got into the habit of running to the gym, 2.3 miles from the high school. The rain is gentle and constant, but it feels good. Nice and easy strides, my feet go on autopilot, having made this run so many times before. Sweat begins to join the rain and my breath grows deeper and deeper. The scenery after the first quarter mile of small-town shops, cloistered along each other, falls away into just one long cornfield all the way to the gym. Everything flattens and expands out into green, road, and sky. The

pounding of my feet against pavement, the puffing of my breath, everything outside unchanging, causes me to slowly slip into a trance, no one but me and space and the occasional car blowing past me.

After a few minutes, a black dot in the distance appears at the very edge of the navy horizon just before sunrise. The dot grows larger and into the shape of an old man taking long strides, which seem to bounce, his left arm holding a long piece of wood he strikes against the pavement with every step. A mane of white hair wrapped into a tight ponytail matches a grizzly beard which comes into focus as he draws closer, a single black backpack clinging to his shoulders as he sings joyously. For just a moment, I can see his wrinkles emanating from the bright blue eyes, transfixed behind me. We pass each other right in front of the gym. I feel like I know the man and stand for a few moments listening to him sing "Big Rock Candy Mountain." It trails off farther and farther until the words fade to a single, jubilant static. Suddenly I remember who he is and wonder if I should follow him.

The Concourse at South Eastern Community College last Monday:

It never fails. The vultures are always lined along the walkway to class, picking at some soft spot in your heart,

making you feel like shit because you don't want to join their bullshit club. I've found the best way to avoid the fake smiles of people wanting you to fill their quota is to look down, turn on my iPod, and keep looking at a watch on my wrist that doesn't exist. It looks like you're running late for class. My eyelids waver from exhaustion. Worked half the night. Work half of most nights now so I can go to school during the day. I work at a warehouse, loading and unloading mattresses from the trucks into storage.

I feel a gentle tap on my shoulder and I twist around, taking my headphones out without thinking. A toothpick of a boy with a soft face and fluffy, brown hair combed tenderly to the side is grinning at me in a suit and tie with that obnoxious smile and holding one of those green, god-forsaken books, pushing it into my hand.

"Yeah?" This guy actually poked me to get my attention.

"Excuse me sir, but do you accept Jesus as your personal savior?"

"No. Not interested." I try to side step him, but he steps right in front of me.

"I want to see you in heaven with me, brother. What do you think happens after you die?"

"A funeral."

"Yes, but then what?"

"Everyone goes home and goes about their lives." I step past him, but I can hear the tapping of feet, keeping in

stride with mine.

"Just read the good word, brother."

"There are much less destructive ways to get high," I grumble as I toss the green book into the nearest trashcan. Most people who get those miniature, green books want to do the same thing, but instead they put them in the back of a shelf or smash them at the bottom of some drawer. I'm just honest about it.

The morning of my High School graduation

I'm dressed in my electric blue cap and gown, golden cord draping over my shoulders as I'm sitting in the only chair not covered in old newspapers or old shoe boxes, anxiously waiting on Mom to finish getting ready so we can leave. All the kids at Jackson High pretend that graduation day doesn't matter to them, but it does to me. Mom is probably just trying to find the camera so she can take a picture of her handsome son. At the end of graduation, the seniors get the first copies of the yearbook and I'm going to be in it four times. Every other yearbook picture I've been in, my chin has sunk into my gobbler, my hair greasy and messy, eyes distant, glazed, and usually looking just to the lower left of the camera, more asleep than awake. Every year I got older, but the single picture amidst the book full of healthy, skinny faces never changed.

But this year is different because I'm in the yearbook for graduation, golden cord, cross-country, and the normal senior picture, saved for the back of the book. I bought a blue button-up, size medium, for the picture. After all, the seniors' pictures are the only ones in color and I want to look my best. Where is Mom? We need to leave soon.

A scratching noise comes from down the hall in Mom's room. Then a gasp, gasp, gasp, deeper, deeper, deeper and an exhale where the crackling collapses into the familiar sound of tears.

I wade my way to the end of the hall, each step crunching on Wal-Mart bags full of retail trash: clothes tags, DVD coverings, and dozens of figurine boxes. The door is opened just a crack and I see Mom, hair wet, thin, and stringy and a Cinderella beach towel wrapped around her. Apparently she has just gotten out of the shower and is standing between her closet and bed, piled a foot high with clothes. Beach towels are the only ones that can wrap all the way around my mom. The bloated body seems to drip like wet wax from her overburdened frame. "Maybe this black shirt with these pants? Oh this blouse could work with this... no.. Or maybe... no forget it. It doesn't fit anyway." She bursts into tears again and collapses onto the bed. "God please help me choose something



Resting by Levi Smolin

to wear. Help give me the strength to go on. Please God, help my knee and back problems so I can control my weight. Through You, I know anything is possible."

Now I have to be her savior, the answer to her prayers. Push down all the excitement. This day isn't about me anymore. It's about her.

"It's going to be okay mom. It's going to be okay." She collapses into my arms.

"I'm so sorry, Anthony. I'll be ready in a minute, I just have to find something to wear."

"Don't cry, Mom. Now, let's find you something to wear."

During the drive and the Graduation Ceremony

This day's supposed to be about me, she's sick and hurting, so what, I'm hurting, how much are you? She's let herself go she's a fat f-- no you can't say that, she's your mom about me about me

ABOUT ME everything's about her no she doesn't mean for it to be how do you know? I don't yes I do she loves me she's my mom. Dad would make it all better. Dad would make it all better, he's dead, left us alone left her alone and me with a burden mom's not a burden she's in pain her legs and back are hurt because of her weight you have it reversed no she does rewind rewind God doesn't help her I do I help her no you don't she's still crying alone it's bullshit it's all bullshit pray to the heavens and trust those here won't let you die yearbook four times year book four times all the days panting just so I could see the second to last runner. I got lost I kept running I changed it she didn't, given up she's given up she's let everyone pass her and expects me to carry her tired, tired, tired, tired so tired. It's about me not her me fuck-

ing angel figurines, drowning in figurines, can't breathe in my house because of the figurines can't get out of the house because of those figurines spent all the money on the figurines makes her feel better those figurines, community college because of those figurines no money no father no mother no I have a mother I love her and she's drowning me better off if she was de- don't say it you don't mean it, it would be easier, beside the point it is the point alone I want to be alone dad left us alone not alone yes alone. She's just so kind and sweet, like a baby, defenseless. Defenseless I'm not weak like her, I'm not I was born to be like that but I'm not I'm strong I will be strong ice cold. I control my life not some guy with a white beard who throws lightning bolts at heretics and...

Graduation Dinner at Steak and Shake

Steak and Shake is my favorite restaurant. For some reason, the Steak and Shake is crowded and Mom and I have to wait to be seated. After a few moments, a pretty girl with long, straight hair and teeth smiles at me and leads us to a table. Mom shifts side to side uneasily. I can already see panic pushing against the corners of her eyes from embarrassment. "Miss, can we sit at a booth?" I ask, smiling pleasantly. The full weight of mom's frame topples easily and sitting in chairs often



The Green Door by Levi Smolin

looks like a top nearing the end of its spinning.

"Uh sure, just wait one more minute while I clean this table," the pretty girl says, trying to hide the annoyance in her face, but after a few moments, we're sitting in our booth across from each other.

"Anthony, I'm so, so, so proud of you. My little scholar has graduated high

school. If only your father could see."

"It's ok, Mom, don't cry."

"I'm just so proud of you. Gold chord, my boy the scholar and my boy the varsity athlete. I know things have been tough, but brighter days are coming."

I didn't have the heart to tell her again that, technically, I was only on Jr. Varsity.

"And such a handsome

boy you are." She caresses my cheeks, which have retreated back to my cheek bones.

"Thanks, Mom."

"Can I get you started on anything today?" our waitress asks, smiling happily again, having snuck up on us.

"Can I have a steak burger with cheese fries and a water?" I'm going to need to run twice as far tomorrow, but it's a celebration.

"And I would like a large Coke, a triple steak burger, cheese fries, and a peanut buttercup shake please? Oh, with hot fudge and caramel."

The nametag on the waitress says Sally. She really is pretty. I feel my stomach from over my shirt and count each individual muscle I've sweated so long for. After a few minutes, Sally makes her way back to our table with a tray full of food and places it in front of us.

"Is there anything else I can get for you?" she smiles. Her eyes are dull blue. I want to speak, but my throat goes dry and nothing comes out.

"No, I think we're good. Thank you, ma'am," Mom says. Then Sally's gone, leaving me with my cowardice. Grease drizzles down mom's jowls and she hums happily as the food quickly begins to disappear.

"Oh, shoot. Anthony, we forgot to pray," Mom says. I close my eyes. "God, I just want to thank You for the food, for family, and espe-

cially today for Anthony's graduation. Truly through You we can do anything, and I just ask that You continue to bless him and make him happy. A-men."

Then chewing sounds return in a saliva-saturated squishing. Hoping for salvation is just an excuse to decay into the couch with potato chip bags and figurines littered around her.

My Dad's viewing Sophomore Year of High School

I'm hungry. The air is stuffy and everyone's standing in small groups, trying not to stare at me. Mr. Jackson is sipping on a glass of water, his beard clinging to a few droplets as he talks to his wife, his head turning away from me freely, but it seems to clank when it starts to turn the other way. He's thinking. Thinking if he should talk to me. What can he say? I don't know. The room is brown. The carpet is brown. The walls are brown. The coffin at the far end is brown. I just don't want to be sad anymore, but everything people do to comfort is reminding me that my dad's in the box. I'm tired of being sad all the time. I need a Coke and a Big Mac. It's hot in here.

The pictures up on the bulletin boards of my dad are lined along the walkway up to the coffin, and making my chest swell open while my throat swells shut. He was standing behind me with his hairy arms, smiling as I was

blowing out the candles to my cake. I was six.

My mother is sitting in a chair someone had pulled up for her with a group piling around, trying to console her, egging her on like they're egging me on. They don't mean for it to be that way, but that's the way it is. I'm in a play. Mom is playing her part. She's trembling. The louder she cries, the more people gather around her, aggressively sympathetic glances averted from me. I feel distant and a faint sense of relief with every head that turns completely around to mom. Look at the brown carpet. Look at your black dress shoes, which have already come untied. I can't. My belly is in the way, the white button-up bloated out, the buttons holding their breath. Dad's dead. Died of cancer.

I slip out of the room and into the lobby of the funeral home, passing the little end table with a pastel, floral book where everyone who comes in is supposed to sign. Maybe things won't be so bad as I think. After all, now that Mom doesn't have to spend all her time taking care of Dad, she can start cleaning up the mess in the living room. Ice and snow cling to the edges of the steps and handrails with grains of salt having melted a walkway in the middle of the cement steps. The wind hits me and knocks the breath out of my chest. My cheeks burn so I put my head

in between my legs on the edge of the stairs and feel my sweat burn into ice on my back and pits. It feels wonderful.

"Hey, son."

I almost hope to see my dad, but it's just an old man with a long white beard and hair pulled back into a ponytail. He's standing over me wearing a black cassock and silver cross around his neck and his eyes are a gleaming blue, smiling warmly down at me nearly lost in all the hair.

"Hey," I answer, momentarily looking at him before putting my head back between my knees. I feel him sit down beside me.

"Do you mind if I sit with you, son?"

"No."

"It's a beautiful day today. Crisp and clear. It's the way today should be."

"It's cold."

"Exactly." He breathed in deeply and just relaxed next to me. It's the first time I've felt "comforted" all day because I'm not alone and nothing is expected of me. After a few minutes, he stands back up, slaps me on the back and says, "I suppose I shouldn't indulge myself any longer and go back inside to placate all the consoler. Thank you, son." The crow's feet sag and his eyes relax into a weary sadness.

"Ok, sir. Excuse me, but who died?"

"My wife, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry. What do you do about it?"

"Well, I suppose I like to take long walks alone. There's something redeeming about a good, long walk, isn't there? You just never know where it'll take you."

"I wouldn't know."

"I feel that we may very well understand each other better than anybody in that building understands us at this moment. What's your name, my boy?"

"Anthony." Then, feeling obligated to add, "My dad's

dead. Died of cancer."

"My name is Alex. You're a strong boy, Anthony, and I wish you luck." Then he leaves, pausing at the front of the door, crossing himself three times before disappearing inside and I quickly get up as well and go back inside to my mother's hand and to deal with the rest.

That night I walk around the block three times and get the crazy notion to try to run the damn thing.

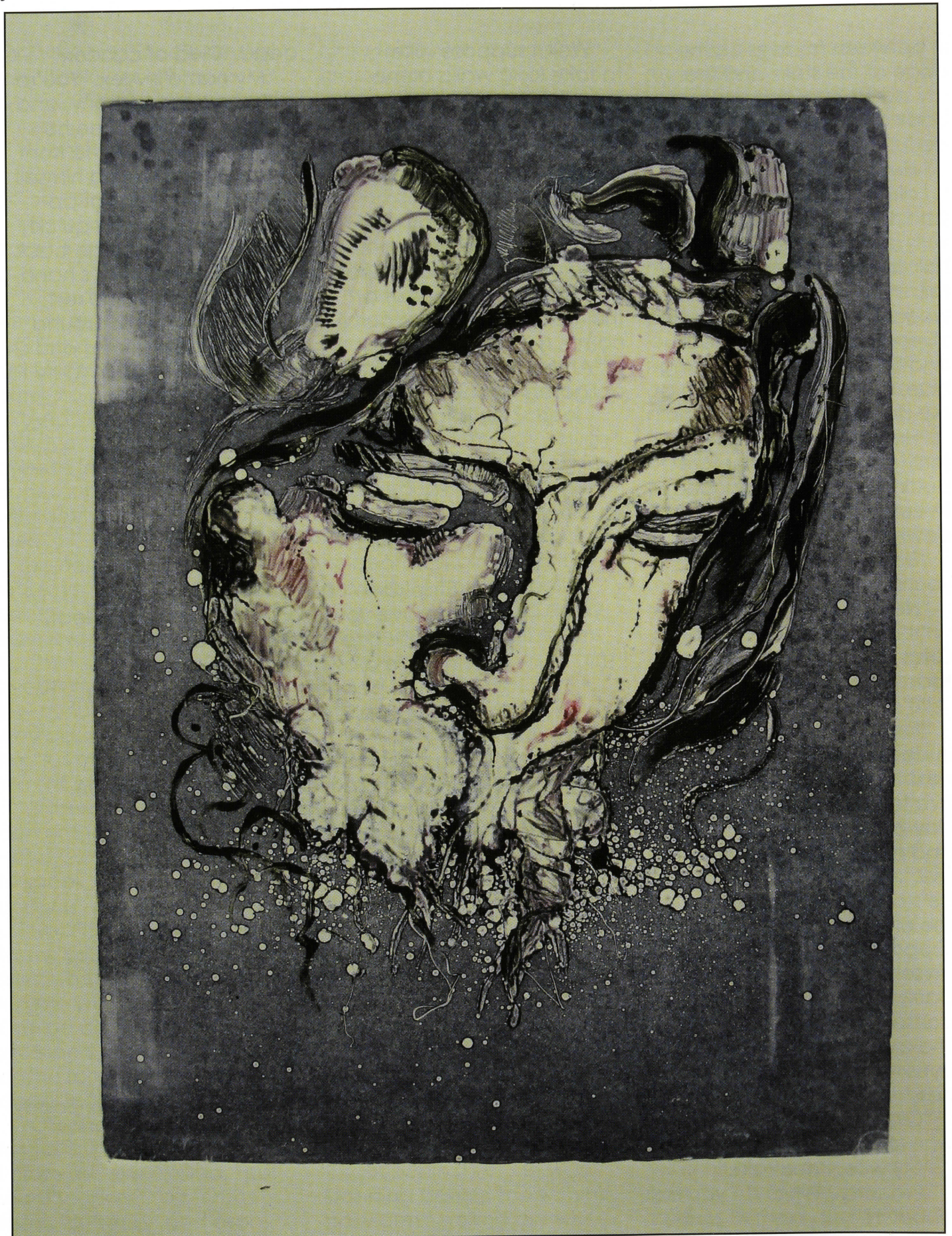
To Vegetarians: A Rebuttal

Stop! Don't eat that lettuce,
remove your fork from that spinach leaf.
What once were crisp, fresh leaves
now lie drowned and withering,
buried beneath a fattening dressing
on your plate.

Those plants were once organic:
free-ranging leaves grown by the sun.
Now piles of their perspiring leaves
lie in the bottom of a crinkled bag,
wilting under a bright fridge bulb.

So please, reconsider your diet.
Eat a steak, carve a chicken.
Crack open an egg.
Don't allow the plants
to be ripped from their roots,
stuffed in body bags,
and shipped around the country.

— Jordyn Coady



Pietà by Emily Quinn

The Devil's Gumbo

The devil perches at the door of his 40 Days Diner,
illuminates the words "Now serving stones as bread"
as we wander the sun-dried wasteland of existence.
The fumes, the warmth, the ample seating
make us pull off the grainy two-lane artery
and into a "For Saints Only" spot in his parking lot,
the spot nearest the entrance.

We hold out our hands for menus,
but he is only serving his gumbo,
the house specialty,
the final destination of scraps and sinners.
The innards of wayward souls bubble up
at the touch of his wooden spoon,
and we cannot tell whether the gumbo is hissing
or lost souls are sighing.

Toss us into the pot, we tell him,
toss us into the gumbo everlasting.
Crackling sizzling gumbo, your flavor and your spices,
they comfort us,
because we would rather belong to something foul
than belong to nothing at all.
In we go, stirred deeper while
the devil adds a dash of pepper and grins,
"I like the squirms and squeals of the live ones."
(He samples the gumbo and licks his lips.)
We are next. We promise him flavor.

—Scott Fenton

The Blind Man

My soul is like a sheet
of Braille,
with tiny dents hammered in,
and the blind man who passed his fingers
over them would weep
for the failure, failure,
failure;
he would wait for the universe
to write an ending to my story
but i
would press a finger to his lips.

The universe has not failed me;
i have lined my soul with lead
and no god could shoulder it,
no god could carry the sins.

—Kiersten Wones

To Lose

Courtney Collins

Creative
Nonfiction

When I was six, my dad's father had passed away, and I had to miss school to go to the funeral. My cousins and I had been more worried about what to get out of the vending machine with the seventy-five cents our parents had given us than what was going on in the next room where the never-ending line of dressed-up, elderly people had stood.

I froze when I heard her. A week before, I had been home for Thanksgiving break. Granddaddy wasn't doing great, but he was much better than before. He was cracking his corny jokes like always and kept saying "Roll Eagle" to me since he'd been an Alabama fan his whole life but would still side with me despite his crimson and white bias. We couldn't go to my aunt's to eat together since he was bedridden, so all thirty-four of us crammed into my grandparents' cozy little house and had our big holiday dinner. Turkey, ham, cranberry sauce, baked beans, potato salad, and his favorite, Whitt's barbeque.

Before that, though, was my birthday. November fifth had fallen on a Friday that year, and my mom had told me it was crucial that I come home that weekend, and that I hurried. They thought we were going to lose Granddaddy then, but he'd made it through. That's the thing:

since he had done a one-eighty in those few weeks, I thought he was invincible. He wasn't your average, frail, elderly man. He was supposed to still be the strong grandfather who could pick me up over his head and play softball with all the kids on Mother's Day. When she told me that he hadn't pulled through this time — that the fluid in his body from his failing heart had suffocated him — it was incomprehensible.

There's no way to prepare for death. Since his stroke last January, my grandfather had been paralyzed and then eventually diagnosed with congestive heart failure. He'd had an ischemic stroke. In one second, 32,000 brain cells die because blood isn't reaching the affected part of the brain. Ischemic strokes kill over 163,000 Americans a year and leave almost 270,000 disabled. They kill happiness and reasoning. They leave the survivors with battle scars and permanent wounds, just like they did with Granddaddy. He had a 2" long scar on his neck from the emergency surgery they had to do to unblock his carotid artery, and it never went away. Neither did the paralysis or unbearable pain.

Just like three of his brothers, he'd laid brick his whole life and retired at seventy-four. Memaw would make his lunch every morning and send him a cold thermos of

milk. "Drink ya milk, Corky," he'd tell me when I came in from school. He was always upbeat and encouraging. He was the "cute old man" who everyone wanted to have as his or her own grandfather. But when this stroke came, it killed his ambition, his drive, and even a little of his will to live. He'd never had a needy notion about him until this bodily evil took its toll. Sometimes he was so childlike it was just pitiful. He couldn't go five minutes without my yelling for my grandmother to come comfort him or bring him something to ease the pain.

Granddaddy wasn't used to being cooped up in the house. He was used to going to the Wellness Center four days a week and then walking three miles with my grandmother, not struggling to take three painful steps across the living room; even then, still having to use a walker. Watching this, *witnessing it*, just made me want it to end for him. He was in so much pain and there was so much hurt in his eyes. Why should anyone, especially such a devout man who'd done nothing but give and love his whole life, have to endure such terrible agony? No one should have to live through his own demise and deterioration.

I knew that this was coming. I knew his weak heart could only beat so many

times, and his fluid-filled lungs could only endure so many more short, quick breaths. The only difference was that I wasn't there when it happened. I'd told him goodbye, but I didn't really believe that was the last time I'd ever see him. Three weeks before he had called and sung "Happy Birthday" to me. His singing was weak, but you could hear his deep, bold choir voice coming through from his fifty-seven years of never missing a Sunday service.

I'd always tell him "sweet dreams" before I left when I visited. That's what his mom said to him when he was little. "Bye little lady. Love you," he'd say, just like he'd always said for the past

twenty years. I would move to the right side of the bed to hug him since his left arm was paralyzed. Somehow, he still retained a little bit of optimism, even on his worst days. "At least it didn't take my brick-laying arm from me. Maybe I'll get to get back out there and build you a house one day. You, Brock, Carson, Evan. All of you."

Sometimes I wish that the visitation, the funeral, the graveside, that they all would've sealed everything away. The tears, the unhappiness, the void, the pain. I can't process exactly why this had happened to him, or why he had to endure it for so long. The memories only lead to running mascara and

the heart-wrenching realization that he's not here anymore. I can't even read the letters he has sent me over the years without tears falling on the yellowed paper.

The long-sleeved plaid shirts that smelled like grass when he'd been outside mowing all afternoon. The red 1984 Ford F150 that was coated with dirt even if Memaw had washed it earlier in the week. The strong distaste he had for cheese, casseroles, pizza, sweet tea. The mushy cards and presents he always gave my grandmother for Valentine's Day and their anniversary. The dip in their brown leather couch where he'd sat every night watching *The Price is Right*.



Trails by Andrew Whited

The shiny, squeaky black shoes he'd polish every Sunday morning. The smile on his face when he was sitting on the bleachers during my volleyball games. The thick, curly, white hair that all of my grandparents' friends envied. The tons and tons of candy that he hid in a drawer in the kitchen. I miss everything. Every little thing that reminds me of him. Going in their house and into their bedroom and knowing that my grandmother has no one to wake up beside, no one else's clothes to wash or lunch to make just makes my heart ache for her, for my family.

I tried taking the letters he'd written me on my birthday, at church camp in middle school, just because he hadn't seen me in a month since I'd been in Auburn, and hide them. I put them in a drawer. I pressed "End" when the answering machine recording came on when I called their house. I turned the pictures of us together facedown and stopped dusting the frames. I said I had to go when Memaw started talking about him on the phone, even though she needed me to listen. I blocked my thoughts about him. But I also blocked all of my feelings and all of my emotions about him, and about everything.

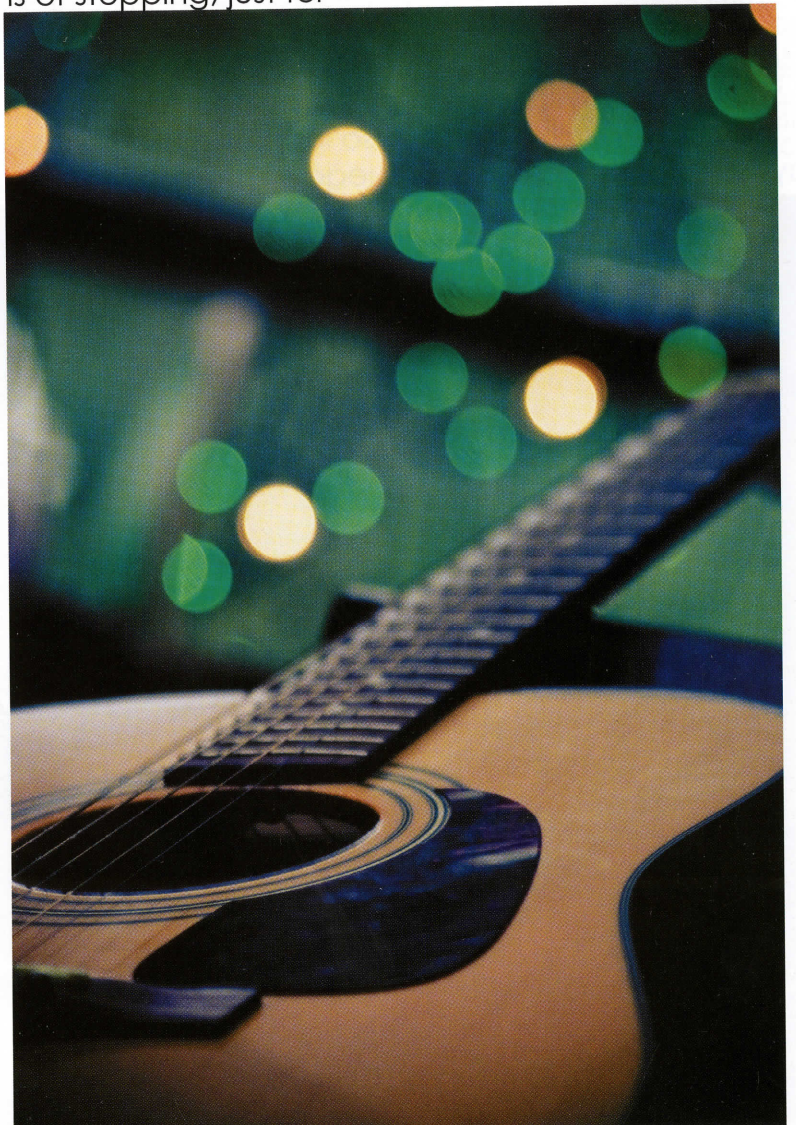
Then I realized that even if I do have watery eyes in the grocery store when I see Raisin Bran, which I thought was absolutely disgusting when

I stayed at their house and had to eat it for breakfast every morning, there's no point in trying to cover those snip-pets of him up. He's much too good a man for that, and he means too much to me. I guess I thought it would be easier to try and shield those memories and pretend like it's okay, but it isn't.

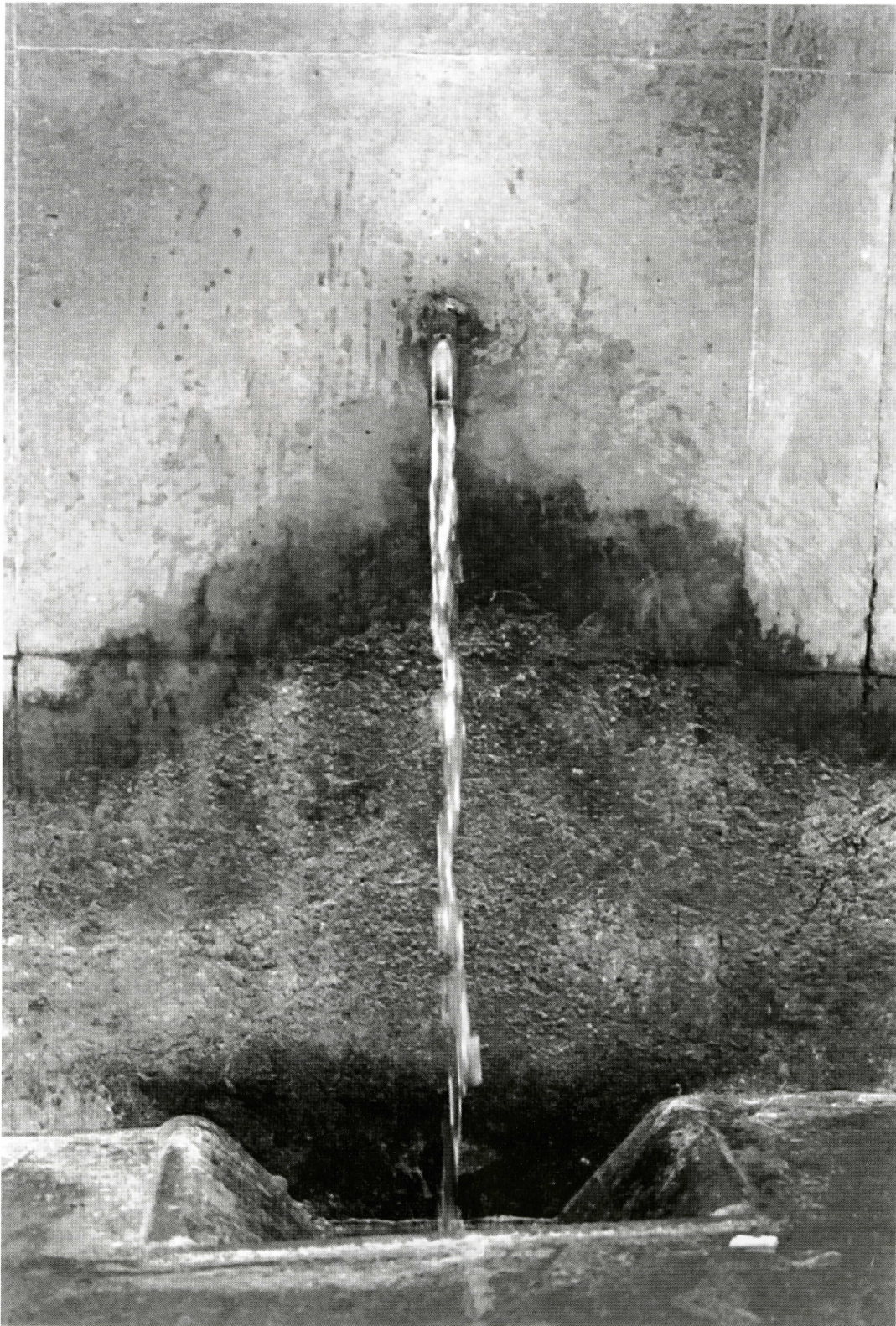
Dealing with losing someone isn't spelled out for you. That person is everywhere. Anything that can relate even remotely to him or her, will. And it's okay. Those little notions of stopping, just for

a minute, to watch *Bonanza* just because he did, or opening a can of Old Spice in the toiletry aisle to try and remember the smell are what keep them alive to us. I don't think it's possible for the emptiness or the sadness to completely fade away, but the memories can and will unless we let them linger and live through us, as long as we're open to remembering them.

It's his birthday today. He would've been eighty, and he's here celebrating not *with us*, but *through us*.



Guitar by Andrew Whited



Fountain - Rome, Italy by Emiliy Quinn

Salt and Dust

I.

Hop a plane to islandside.
Seas and mountains juxtaposed,
On greenery, laments scoured
In brazen lines of white and tan.

Eyes upturned like sunflower faces
Drift to one with brash interest,
Flames craving fresh oxygen
To keep a-dance the tongue of heat.

How the sea drifts and sways,
Pushes dreams from idle heads,
Tides and time joined as one:
A whirling dance of colors and wind.

II.

The air they breathe is different here
Thick with dust, salt, and breeze.
Hills—more mountains—shadow towns,
Afternoons turn from get-up-and-go
To lie-down-and-sleep. There is a weight:
A crushing contentment, inhaled, not felt,
That drives one nearly to sighing slumber
With sun and visit that should never change.

Island, with your shadows deep,
Hide me in your hills of sleep.

--Shane Ruckstuhl



Fading Beauty by Andrew Whited



Theatre Lights by Emily Quinn

Fiction

Marybell's Rain

Gabrielle Bates

Marybell Stone watched the winter Alabama rain write hectic symphonies on her mother's car window. The droplets were alive and jittery, tearing at the reflection of her blue hair bow by racing with jerks and sprints in all directions. With alarming frequency, two drops would join forces by happenstance and rocket across the window in the liquid trail of one who had crawled along before, just to hit the edge and be flung off onto the pavement like the others. It all made Marybell very sad, but she watched anyway because, as it stood, there was little else for her to do.

Sure, she could have looked over at her mother where she sat jabbering on her cell in the driver's seat. She could have, of course, admired how the woman's left knee was bent up and leaning against the car door, the red ponytail hanging flat with artificial straightness, or the sparkly stud adorning a perfectly pointed nose. The nose piercing, like the hair color, was a recent development. Mills asked for it for his birthday. He liked edgy girls. Marybell could have looked at her mother, but she chose to watch the rain.

The purple lip stain worn by Leigh Stone, or Leigh

Vanimore as she was now called once again, succeeded in making her teeth appear particularly white, so she made sure to smile when she stopped at red lights, regardless of what the person on the other side of the phone was talking about. Even if she was listening to a story about how so and so's cousin drowned to death during a family lake trip, the woman would smile so big that if you didn't know any better, and the men in the other cars certainly didn't, you would think she was being showered with Shakespearean sonnets.

Marybell had hoped that this Friday afternoon would be different, that this time her mother would talk to her instead of chatting on the phone the whole ride. Marybell had thought that maybe Leigh would ask her about the drawing she had done at school, the one of the puppy with a rainbow collar that she had deliberately placed on the dashboard upon climbing into the black Civic, but Leigh had glanced over the paper haphazardly, just long enough to make sure it wasn't a field trip form requiring her loopy signature, re cranked the engine, and bulleted out of the Peachtree Elementary School parking lot without so

much as a word.

Marybell fought back the tears lurching upwards from beneath her brown eyes. She knew why her mother didn't talk to her. It was because she was boring. Marybell wanted to talk, to be interesting, but she needed prompting. She didn't know how to tell stories or make jokes like the other kids did to make grown-ups laugh and love them. Marybell needed a "What did you do at school today, honey?" or a "How did your Charlotte's Web presentation go?" Her father, Henry Stone the electrical engineer, asked those kinds of questions sometimes. He also made her egg-in-the-holes for breakfast and laid out her school clothes every night before bed. Leigh thought he was boring too. That's why she cried when she read the last page of *The Awakening*, and that's why Leigh packed her silky clothes in a suitcase and left to live with Carlos the big shot attorney instead.

"Oh nothing, just calling to chat," said Leigh, as her daughter busied herself with a loose thread on the hem of her Scooby Doo coat.

Leigh scraped the bumper on the curb when she pulled up to 617 S. Genesis Street. The large Tudor house looming at the top of the hill was the inheritance of

Locked In

We are committed, these raindrops
and I, locked into the trajectory
of our fall. This lease agreement
lies on the floor, the industrial grain
of my carbon copy signature scrawl
a one year obligation. My set of keys
bolts the door, like a prison.

The snare drum strikes of rainfall
continue on the roof. Across town
a train's whistle gapes its mouth, belches
exhaustion, joins the refrain, sounds
a valid complaint of internal
combustion-firing pistons, churning
belly, the groan of motion.

Rivulets of dirt streak
the window brown. I stare out.
Grotesque, this ground
like a saturated sponge, a marsh
at every step, the new carpet
already muddied with my footprints.
I won't go out in this.

As the train moves on, I imagine
leaving with it on those wet, rusty
tracks until somewhere out of town
my mind derails. In the silence,
an echo of the whistle's fading howl
bounces off these clean white walls.

—Michael Landreth

Mills Upton, a middle aged
trust-fund baby who had,
after his parents' death,
abandoned the family
investment banking tradition
to focus on more spiritually
fulfilling hobbies, namely,
painting trash and smoking
marijuana. It was hard to
tell how many people lived
in the place. The house,
upon falling into Mills's grimy

hands, had become one of
those communal home deals
where people set up camp
to perfect their juggling
act before hitch-hiking to
California.

Mills's painted Fox 6
News van in the driveway
was an inflamed pimple
on the house's otherwise
sophisticated exterior. Last
time, the vehicle had been

covered in giant sunflowers
and eye balls. This time, the
staring flowers had been
replaced by a cubistic
portrayal of what appeared
to be profusely bleeding
goats.

Leigh's lips twisted to
one side of her face as she
studied the sky. "Ok, well
I've got to run now, but tell
Richard I said he better find a
way to get his ass over to the
party tomorrow!" She shoved
the phone into her bag,
squinted at the Tudor's front
door, and said, to no one in
particular, "Looks like we're
going to have to make a run
for it."

The party was already well
under way when Leigh burst
through the front door, eye
lashes jeweled with water
droplets and blouse clinging
shamelessly to her breasts.
She flashed an empty smile
at the room as she analyzed
who was and was not
present. By the time Marybell
made it inside, her mother
was dancing out of sight to
the rhythmless cacophony of
an impromptu African drum
circle. Not knowing what else
to do, she followed. Leigh
stopped her spinning and
hip shaking to grab a bottle
out of a man's hand and
take a dramatic swig. Mills
whistled appreciatively from
the kitchen doorway, and
after recovering from feigned
surprise, Marybell's mother
squealed and jumped
into the man's hairy arms
where the pair engaged in

a passionate exchange of saliva. Marybell watched, immobile, as her mother led Mills past Todd the magician, through the maze of swaying humans and hanging couches, down the stairs, and out of sight.

"Splinter just got here if you're looking for somebody to play with," said Todd the magician in a subdued octave that slid like frier grease under the party's raucous overtones. He looked off at nothing and stroked the nose of his toy raccoon tenderly with one long, pianist finger. They called the girl Splinter because the first time Mills found her hiding under the house, the backs of her legs were covered in them. Since then, the stringy-haired ten year old had become like one of those cats that you feed one time and suddenly it's meowing at the back door every night at midnight. As the only two children who frequented Mills's Utopia, Marybell and Splinter had become companions of a sort, watching *The Little Mermaid* on VHS or eating jello together in a vacant bedroom while the adults danced and drugged themselves into oblivion.

Splinter didn't feel like watching *The Little Mermaid* again though.

"Want to play Hide and Seek?"

Marybell nodded.

"I'll count to fifty. No going

outside." Splinter turned to put her forehead against the wall and started counting. "One... Two..." Marybell's eyes lingered on the scars behind Splinter's knees and then darted around the room. The only furniture in the crowded area was a stained red couch and a clump of laughing adults blowing smoke into each others eyes. The stairwell beckoned.

"Ten... Eleven..."

Marybell sprinted down the stairs, but she stopped before turning the corner at the bottom. Mills was saying something about needing to arrange his furniture, and her mother was laughing. Marybell took a deep breath and started counting to herself, in head.

Sixteen.

The little girl peeked around the corner to assess the situation. Mills was laying on his stomach in a bed, and Leigh was riding on his buttocks like a cowgirl. Beyond the bed, the room connected to another hallway. Marybell kept her eyes down as she scurried past, even when Mills strained to lift his chin off the comforter and said, "What's shaking, small doll?"

Marybell slowed when she got to the next door, which had half-finished games of tic-tac-toe scribbled all over it. She heard another one of her mother's explosive giggles as clearly as if the woman were cackling

directly into her ear. It was hard to believe that such a quiet world could exist right below such a thumping, clanking zoo. The door turned out to conceal nothing more than a closet someone had somehow shoved a queen-sized bed and a bunch of plastic flamingos into, so Marybell moved on. She skipped the next door, choosing to pass through a wall of hanging, wooden beads instead. Thankfully, this room held more promise.

Thirty-three. Thirty-four.

A window on the far wall lit an array of junk with dim, gray light. Boxes of limp balloons, carnival prize stuffed animals, and puffy coats sat like islands on the floor. Any of them might have made for excellent hiding places, but Marybell was drawn to something else. A washer and dryer sat like forgotten relics in the corner, calling to Marybell with the promise of more than just concealment. She made her choice. Marybell slipped her rubber boots off and tossed them behind a box of dismantled blenders. Using the box of coats for leverage, she flipped open the lid of the giant washer, hoisted herself up over the corner, and lowered herself gingerly inside.

Forty-two.

Marybell felt a rush of ecstatic relief as she squatted in the metallic



The Blob by Levi Smolin

womb, bent her knees up on either side of the knobby cylinder jutting up from the center, and lowered the lid back down until it was open just enough for her to peer out. Like a naive Atlas, Marybell took up her burden with eager anticipation.

Fifty.

It wasn't long before Splinter entered the room. Marybell watched through a now quivering field of vision as her opponent eventually got so close that Marybell could see the small, crinkly hair sticking out of the brownish mole on the tip of her nose. Marybell became

vaguely aware that Splinter was looking her right in the eyes, but confusion sprang from the huntress's strange expression which sported, not the triumphant glow of the victorious seeker, but something closer to the contemplation of a fortunate feline. And then Marybell understood.

"Do it," she said. Splinter cocked her head to the side, still looking Marybell in the eyes, and then clicked the lid shut in curious obedience.

Marybell fought to suppress the sudden panic that twisted her stomach when she heard the beeps and mechanical click click clicking of dials and buttons. She banged simultaneously with both fists on the sides of her confinement. They would hear. They would have to hear. Something slid across overhead, causing the thin metal top to bend and pop. Marybell felt the tears welling up again, but this time she didn't fight to suppress them. As if cued by her tears, water began to trickle down the sides of the washer. Marybell thrashed as forcefully as she could against the top and sides. Then she was spinning, and fiery cold water was finding its way into her nose and mouth. Marybell was aware of distant pangs all over her body, but she kept thrashing her limbs around as quickly and forcefully as she could manage. They would have to hear. Suddenly, she

couldn't feel anything. Her head went numb following a flash of severe pain as her bow caught on the cylinder and ripped part of her scalp away in its desertion. She heard a wail, and the girl thought of Splinter. Was she in here too? Gurgles, choke, throb.

Marybell saw her mother's mouth opening and closing in muted horror like a fish left writhing on sand. The box of blender bits lay crumpled on its side, and the pieces had spilled out on the floor where they glinted like beetles in the dusky window light. Back and forth, back and forth, cradled in Leigh's shaking arms, Marybell's head lolled away from pulsing neck flesh, and her eyes clamped with icy interest on the dirty window pane. Salty wetness splashed and mingled with washer fluid and red slime on her forehead. Sound returned, and Marybell became aware of her mother's voice begging for response, shouting croaklike pleas with a need that Marybell's young heart once knew all too well. It was all so interesting, Marybell thought. Fascinating really.

Despite what her limp and broken form would suggest, the little girl was fully aware of her ability to move and speak, of her power to console with words or movement the hysterical

fish woman in whose blood warm arms she was fiercely and dotingly enfolded. But Marybell kept her mouth shut and chose, instead, to watch with smiling eyes how the woman's screams orchestrated a familiar symphony on the window.

A blue satin bow sat wet

and mangled in the bottom of the washer, bound to a knobby metal cylinder by a soulless creature of shineless black hair. Leigh held her daughter close and begged for a sign of consciousness, but the rain just turned to sleet, and the drops kept hitting the asphalt.

Blue Carpet

Blue carpet—
no, not just blue,
plush aqua blue—
spreads into the horizon
of my imagination.

Stuffed animals and plastic figurines
shake off their coat of dust
and become heroes on my blue battlefield.
Ken saves Barbie from the monstrous,
smiling Pikachu, who lives on Bed Mountain.
Mermaid Barbie swims in the carpeted sea,
but longs to be human like Diva Barbie.
Alas, no outfit will fit over her plastic fins.

When the battles have been fought,
and the sea run out of ideas,
my toys must go back to their patches
of dust, and become lifeless once again.

My imagination's horizon darkens,
as does my carpet, from aqua to mere blue.

I lie in the last swatch
of sunny carpet,
and listen to the quiet crunch
of passing cars,
and the clamor of the birds
as they call "chick-a-dee-dee-dee."

I wish always to lie in my plush blue carpet,
but someday my horizon will run dry,
and crumble into beige and eggshell.

—Jordyn Coady

Rebuilding

Jordan Luke

Fiction

Perry

The sign read *Bienvenue en Louisiane* and it was the first time she'd seen it since she had glanced at it through the minivan's back window on her way out last August. It had been a rough year, stuck in a too small house in a too foreign school in a city that was nothing like the one she had been molded to love and that she had missed so dearly. It felt good to be back.

They drove the rest of the way in humble silence. She stared out of the passenger side window. Deserted neighborhoods, rotting new car lots, rows of FEMA trailers, blue tarps, the x codes. It all seemed so familiar, yet so distant. One year had turned Perry into a stranger.

They pulled into Lakeside and the first thing out of her mother's mouth was, "Quiet. Everything is so damn quiet. Where are the neighbors? Perry, I thought you said the Landrieus came back last week." Perry didn't respond and grabbed the one bag that contained everything she had deemed necessary last August: three pairs of jeans, two t-shirts, a worn-in Tulane sweater, socks, underwear, a sports bra, makeup bag, her iPod, and a copy of *The Awakening*. She had also stuffed a few photos of her friends at

the beach from earlier that summer, for good measure. She thought she'd be back in a few days, not held hostage for an entire year.

Perry walked up to the brick outside the first floor dining room window, to her family's very own x code. The codes had been marked on every house checked after the storm to record the hazard of each house and the death looming inside. Perry had heard about them on the news but never assumed she'd be able to call one her own.

She stared at the spray-painted X. The top number had a 9-16 on it, the date that Perry's house had been searched and the bottom space had a 0. It meant that no bodies were found in the house. The other two spaces were blank. Perry ran her fingers over the bright orange mark one last time and sighed.

"Get in here, Perry. Help me with these bags."

Perry rolled her eyes and walked into the house, crossing the familiar threshold. She was suddenly sweating. It was warm outside—a typical Louisiana summer afternoon—but it was sweltering inside. The foyer smelled like eggs and rotten seafood. She glanced around and shuddered. The house looked the same, but

different. There was a water line that had etched its way across the brown molding. Debris covered the floor. There was a torn up couch cushion to her right, covered in broken glass. The lamp from her bedroom was blocking her entrance into the living room. Sunlight beat onto the dining room table, the only piece of furniture still in its original position.

"Perry, where are you? Hurry!" It took Perry a while to maneuver over the debris and broken furniture in her path to the door that led to the back yard, where the fallen trees had already been cleared and the basketball goal had been pushed to the side. She set her eyes on her new home. *Great. Her very own FEMA castle.*

It was a pull trailer like the one her grandparents used to take on family camping trips, without the colorful 80s-esque style designs. And it smelled a lot worse, stale almost. She threw her bag onto the dining booth that doubled as a bed and stomped outside and back into the minivan. She turned on B97 and lit a cigarette. *"The Saints will be kicking off their 2006 season and returning to the Dome tonight against the Falcons. It's the Monday Night Football season opener and it's sure*

to be a great ga—" Perry switched off the radio.

"You know what we should do, Perry? When we get home?" her dad had asked when they were evacuated in Montgomery.

"Get some beignets?"

"No, goofball. Go to a Saints game. Actually, go to the first game when they're back in the Dome." They were sitting around the small dining room table of the two-bedroom apartment they had been renting for the past few weeks until they could head back to New Orleans.

Perry smiled. "Sounds like a plan to me."

Of course the game was sold out by now, had been for months, and he was still in Montgomery. "Perry! Where are you? I can't figure out this damn satellite to save my life!" And she was stuck here with her mother.

Perry went for a walk and turned onto Carondelet Street, where there seemed to be a little more life. There were neighborhood kids racing bikes, being chased by a little chihuahua and Crazy Marge was on her porch as usual, rocking. Crazy Marge got the nickname because she stayed for the storm. She was a stubborn old woman.

One of Perry's friends from school had heard that Crazy Marge had almost drowned when the water from the levees came. She sat on her roof for a day and a half and one of those men hanging from the helicopters like she had seen on the news had rescued her. Perry couldn't imagine sitting through the wind and rain and thunder and horror that storm brought with it. Crazy Marge waved and said "Who Dat!" but Perry just lit another cigarette and walked past. She thought about her time in Montgomery. The friends she didn't make, the longing she felt to get to back to this place, this moment. And now it all seemed so trite without her father.

"I just got the call from Charity. They reopen next week," her mom said as soon as Perry had returned home from what would become her last day of school at Montgomery Central.

"What? Mom! Are you serious? Let's go. I'm going to go pack my stuff. Can we leave tonight?" Perry ran into the next room, which had been hers for the past eleven months. "Does Dad know? When can we leave?"

Perry's mom walked in and sat on her bed, watching her gather the small pile

of belongings that she had brought with her from New Orleans or accumulated while in Montgomery. Perry's mom, an ER nurse, had been waiting on the call from Charity Hospital since last August.

Perry's mom's face was scrunched up, like she had a bad taste in her mouth. Her mom was not very good with confrontation. Perry already knew what she was going to say but needed to hear it anyway. "Perry, honey, your father's not coming with us tomorrow. He has to stay with this job just kicking off, and the company promised he'd get transferred back home soon and—"

Perry tuned her out. She had just come across her Saints jersey. She threw it in her suitcase and zipped it up.

Perry glanced at her watch. It was a quarter past six now; the game would be starting soon. Her mom had picked up Popeye's fried chicken on the way into town. The food would be getting cold, and she was sure her mother was having trouble figuring out the FEMA castle's television.

"I'm excited for the game, how 'bout you, Perry?" her mom asked when she got back. Perry nodded. "You know, your dad took me to the Dome on our first date.

I was so impressed. He had on a #18 jersey who was some famous player at the time. And I didn't know a thing about football but I sure did have the hots for your dad." Her mom smiled and cracked open a beer before plopping down onto the couch. She pointed to the TV. "Well, wouldya look at that, Perry. The Dome is packed."

Perry sat down next to her mother and stared at the TV. She was right, the Dome was packed. Perry rolled her eyes. She should have been there.

"Mom?"

"Yeah, Perry?"

"Dad's not coming back, is he?"

Perry's mom didn't look at her for several minutes. Perry started to wonder if she had heard the question when she said, "Remember when we were leaving for the storm and I told you to bring enough stuff to last for a couple of days, and something that was important to you. And it took you forever to figure out what was important to you? And you grabbed that picture of your friends at the beach?"

Perry nodded.

"Well, it's like that. It's just taking Dad a long time to figure out what's important to him."

They watched the pre-game in silence, didn't speak when they saw the fans erupting into song as

the Saints ran onto the field, or even cheer as the special teams blocked a punt less than three minutes into the game and scored the first touchdown the city of New Orleans had witnessed in over a year.

It wasn't until halftime that Perry's mom spoke again, "So tomorrow I figured we'd start in the living room and gradually work our way up?"

"Sounds good to me,"

Perry said.

Marge

Marge and Prince Harry had stayed. She vowed when she bought the house in 1974 that she would stay no matter what storm, no matter what category. So she did. The neighbors were coming back one by one, day by day. The Latimer's were the first to arrive and then Dawn Gonzales down the street. Marge had been the only one in the neighborhood to ride out the storm.

Prince Harry still whined and hid his tail between his legs when it began to rain and thunder or he heard water running, but Marge didn't seem to be affected by the experience. Now she rocked back and forth on the porch watching the neighborhood kids race bikes up and down the street. She waved, smiled, and turned up B97. A commercial break had just end-

ed and Bobby Hebert was giving his prediction for the game on Monday. "There's no way we gon' lose this game. Our city has been through a lot and the Who Dat nation is behind us 100 percent. Ain't nobody gon' stop us now." Marge nodded her head. It had been 20 years since she'd been to a Saints game. It felt like it had been 20 years since she'd seen them even win a game, but since the storm there had been black and gold flags and fleur de lis on display all over the city.

"What you say, Prince Harry? You ready to watch the Aints play tonight?" Prince Harry wagged his tail.

Marge went inside and checked on her red beans and rice. She cooked them slow, like her momma had before her and her grand-momma before that. The trick was to leave them on all day and not be shy with the Tabasco. Marge still liked to cook in big portions as if the kids and grandbabies were still going to come over to dinner like they did before the storm.

"Mama, please come to Houston with us," her son Larry had begged. "It's going to be a big one and we can't stay here to take care of you."

But she didn't budge.

Marge liked to think of herself as the captain of a ship. New Orleans was her only home, and if it was going down, then she was going down with it—and she had, but it decided to spit her back up again.

"Why are you not coming with us, grammaw?" her grandson Ty had asked. His eyes were big and watery.

"Well, sugar, grammaw's gotta make sure that monster Katrina doesn't hurt my house or Prince Harry. You understand? I'll be right here waiting for y'all when you get back." Ty nodded.

"Mama I understand you love this house, but this one is different." Larry checked his watch. If they were going to get out in time before the traffic on the evacuation routes really picked up, they would have to leave soon. "Now I love you but I gotta get Ty out of this. Please. Go pack your things."

"Now you listen here, Larry." Marge rarely raised her voice to her son. "I bought this house in 1974 and I told myself I would stay no matter what, and that's what I'm going to do. I've been through Camille and Andrew. I can handle Katrina."

Larry and Ty left soon after that. She didn't blame them for leaving her. Not that day and still not today, but Marge was surprised Larry hadn't put up more of a fight.

She flicked the news onto mute so she could hear the end of Bobby Hebert's show. *"Richards is going to be a showstopper in this one. I'm tellin' ya. Watch out for #12 Falcons because he gon' be comin' for dem Dirty Birds. Signin' off yall, enjoy the game. Who dat!"*

"Who Dat" was the song Marge had sang all day on the roof, rocking in place and holding Prince Harry after the storm hit. She didn't get scared until darkness came and she heard the screaming of the other captains going down with their ships.

She was prepared and had packed a bag full of her most cherished things, including some snacks for herself and Prince Harry, and the #18 Saints jersey her husband Maurice had loved so much he had wanted to be buried in it.

The water had come much faster and stronger than Marge had envisioned. The levees were only a few blocks away. When it started creeping onto the porch outside, she had climbed the ladder to the attic and snuck through the window onto the roof. It was hot. And she had forgotten to pack sunscreen in her survival kit. She was the only one roofing-it as far as she could see in her own neigh-

borhood, but she heard the yelps and woops of people close by and a few other dogs barking.

She spent one night of blackness on that roof. She couldn't tell how high it was getting or how fast, but she could smell the murky water feel it coming closer. Prince Harry's little legs were shaking the whole night. He whined every time he heard a big whoosh or splash, and she prayed.

When light came the water was two feet from the rooftop, and Marge began her list.

"Dear Lord, I've been meaning to tell you some things for a while now, and I guess that now is the perfect time to do it," she said aloud. "I'm sorry for that one time I borrowed my momma's pearl earrings and never gave them back. I'm sorry I spanked Larry after he went down to the lake and caught that water moccasin and brought it back to live in the neighborhood pool. I'm sorry I buried Maurice in a suit. And thank you for Larry and Ty. And for the time, Lord. It's been one hell of a ride."

Marge cracked open the bottle of Southern Comfort she'd been saving for a special occasion. An hour later and half the bottle gone, she was suddenly awoken by a loud, whirring sound.

Marge looked to sky. She was feeling a little dizzy and was squinting because the sun hurt her eyes.

To her right a helicopter was approaching. There was a man hanging down from the helicopter on a cable and he was pointing at her. Marge suddenly wished she had put on her nicer nightgown,

"Hold on, ma'am," the young man said as he jumped from the cable that was hovering over her roof, grabbed her bag and Prince Harry, and pulled Marge up with him. Marge's eyes were big and her face was red from sitting in the sun all day.

As they flew away, she glanced down at the roof she had bought in 1974 and the way the ripples from the helicopter's fan were making circles in the water that surrounded her roof. As she flew towards safety in the Superdome, she felt like she was riding one of those ripples, drifting farther and farther away from her home.

"Who dat, who dat, who dat say they gonna beat them Saints?" Marge sang as she danced around the living room. She walked into the bedroom into Maurice's closet with the untouched clothes. She turned on the light, which flickered twice before buzzing on. She sneezed and started scan-

ning the racks for a black mesh jersey with a gold fleur de lis and the number 18 on the back. When she found it, she put it on, turned off the light and went back in the kitchen to fix herself a plate. It was about time for kickoff.

She turned on the TV. It was eerie seeing the Dome after she had been evacuated there. The helicopter man dropped her off into dry land, but he also dropped her off into long lines for showers and food and a lack of sleep and too many strangers, none of which reminded her of Larry or Ty.

After the blocked punt Larry called her from Houston. "Ma! Did you see it? Did you see that? Whoo Wee what a play!" Marge could hear Ty dancing around in the background.

When they hung up Marge was not hungry anymore. She turned off the game and the lights and sat in silence, listening to the cheers of the neighbors and the sounds of the quiet city night. She remembered when Larry and Ty would come and watch the games at her house.

"Grammaw! Grammaw!! Check out my new jersey!" Ty had run in through the screen porch door one night before the Saints played the Tampa Bay Bucs back be-

fore the storm. "Look! Look!" He jumped around, pointing to the number 18. "It's just like grandpaw's favorite!"

Larry walked in carrying grocery bags full of stuff to make a roux for the gumbo they'd be having for dinner. "Hey Ma! I'm gonna start this right away. Work was a mess, and I'm starvin'."

Marge looked at her grandson in the living room trying to find the game on TV and her only son in the kitchen. She picked up Prince Harry and sat down and smiled to herself.

"Come here, Prince Harry." Now Marge sat in the living room recliner with the dog on her lap. "Oh when the Saints, go marching in, oh when the Saints go marching in." She sang herself to sleep and wished that the city had let her drown with it.

Prince Harry

The barking wouldn't stop. *It's only 10:30 am. Can I not even sleep until noon?* Perry got up out of her makeshift FEMA bed and walked outside to see where the noise was coming from. Her mom had run to Home Depot to pick up some cleaning supplies so they could get started on the house. Perry was all for rebuilding, but only if it started after noon.



The Bayou by Hilary Johnson

She threw the door of the trailer open and there stood the interruption: Crazy Marge's three-pound chihuahua. The dog was whining now. He was probably lost. She grabbed her flip-flops and didn't bother fully changing, a reluctant princess leaving her new castle for the first time. She

scooped the dog up and headed toward Carondelet Street.

Marge woke up in the living room where she had fallen asleep. Prince Harry was no longer on her lap. She stood slowly out of the recliner, shaking out all the cracks and kinks that come

with old age and sleeping. She went into the kitchen, turned on a pot of Community Coffee, and walked out onto the porch, squinting through the sun down the street to see if she could find Prince Harry.

When Perry rounded the corner she saw Crazy Marge

standing on her porch. She was wearing a Saints jersey. She must be really excited about that win last night. Perry walked up to the porch, where Crazy Marge was holding the screen door open for her and Prince Harry.

"Hey, Ms. Marge. I found your dog outside my . . . in my backyard. Thought you might like to have it back." "Oh, Prince Harry, where you running off to boy? Thank you, sweetie." Perry wondered why Crazy Marge had named her dog after a member of the British royal family. "Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?"

Perry didn't drink coffee, but she was suddenly overcome by curiosity to see the inside of Crazy Marge's house. "Sure." As she walked through the front door, she wondered why Marge's house was in such good shape compared to her own, but then she remembered that Crazy Marge had stayed for the storm, and thus had gotten a head start in the rebuilding process.

"Your house looks great. My mom and I are just starting back on ours today."

"It's a long process. Luckily my son was able to come home from Houston for a while to help me out." Marge poured two cups of coffee as Perry glanced around the house. It was small but homey. There were

pictures of a handsome looking guy, probably in his mid-thirties, holding a cute kid.

"Is this your son?" Perry took a sip of coffee and cringed, remembering that she didn't like the taste of it.

"Yes, that's Larry. And my grandson Ty. Ty's turning five this month."

"Do you see them often?"

"Only once since the storm. When Larry came back to help with the house. I would like to visit them, but Houston is so far away. I don't have a car and I've never even been on a plane."

"You know, plane rides don't cost that much these days. I bet they even have special deals for senior citizens."

"Oh, I don't know. I do have a little bit of money saved up for special occasions." Prince Harry was running in and out through the doggy screen door. "But who would take care of the house while I'm gone? And Prince Harry." Marge glanced at the clock on the wall above her refrigerator. "Oh, it's 11. Bobby Hebert will be on now. Do you listen to Bobby? It's Prince Harry's favorite show." Marge turned on her kitchen table radio.

"*What a game last night folks. The Dome was rockin'. If you're in town and you weren't at the game you sure as hell missed out.*"

"You know, Ms. Marge, I

wouldn't mind taking care of the house and Prince Harry while you're gone." Crazy Marge just sighed and never said a word. She sat with Perry and Prince Harry and they listened to the end of the Bobby Hebert show.

"Listen, I gotta go back and help my mom because she's probably home by now but—"

"Perry, would you like to come back tomorrow morning and see how things work out between you and Prince Harry? I'd love to take you up on your offer. I just . . . don't trust anyone with Prince Harry. He's my only family here, after all."

Crazy Marge wasn't facing Perry when she asked the question.

"Sure. I'll come back." Crazy Marge still hadn't turned around. Perry walked toward the front door and left. "Bye, Ms. Marge."

On the walk home Perry couldn't believe she had gone inside Crazy Marge's house and then offered to help her out. *I guess this is a whole new rebuilding process.*

Marge didn't turn around until she heard the front door close. She never actually thought to go visit Larry and Ty in Texas. She always figured they would eventually come back home. "We'll see how you do tomorrow, Prince Harry. I don't want to leave you all alone in this big quiet city."



The Jule Collins Smith Museum by Levi Smolin

The Auburn Circle Fall 2011

What to Read

Book suggestions based on works
you've (probably) read

If you liked *Twilight* (and you like to read) you might enjoy...

***Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice**

After the original *Dracula*, *Interview with the Vampire* is one of the most widely read vampire novels today. Bitten by the Vampire Lestat, Louis struggles with the emerging desires of his new nature as he tries to hold on to his human passions. Beautiful and tragic, this story has just enough complicated relationships and discussions of immortality to keep any fan of the darker side of humanity thirsting for more.

If you liked *Twilight* (and you don't like to read) you might still enjoy...

***Dead Until Dark* by Charlaine Harris**

In a world not too unlike our own, vampires walk the streets of Louisiana's small towns after the new synthetic blood, TruBlood, has made it possible for them to coexist with their human brethren. Sookie, your ordinary human heroine, falls in love with the vampire Bill Compton. The perfect, easy read for fans of today's vampire action-romance. Or, if you really don't like reading, you can watch HBO's TruBlood, based on Harris's series.

If you liked *Harry Potter*, you might enjoy...

***The Magicians* by Lev Grossman**

Boy learns magic is real, boy goes to exclusive magic school, boy discovers a new world of possibilities. Sounds exactly like Harry Potter, right? On the contrary, Grossman takes these parameters and runs with them, adding emotional depth and startling believability. When Quentin Coldwater attends Brakebills, a private magic college in upstate New York, he is bombarded with everything a typical college kid expects from a university: sex,

drinking, and of course, intense spell-casting. However, it is after Quentin and his magician friends graduate that they discover a way to hop between worlds, and Quentin finds himself in over his head in Fillory, the magical setting of his favorite childhood book series. If you immerse yourself in Grossman's alternate reality of college and beyond, you won't regret it.

If you liked *The Hunger Games*, you might enjoy...

***Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card**

The product of years of genetic experimentation, six year old Ender is sent to a military space station to begin his training with the other children who may be Earth's last chance to defeat an alien threat. Only the most brutal mental and emotional training will tell whether Ender will rise to exercise the genius that he was born to or fall to the destructive abuse of his competition and leave humanity to perish. Although not as fast a read as *The Hunger Games*, *Ender's Game* offers a similar kind of thrilling battle of wits and strength among adolescents at high stakes and has characters you won't want to let go of.

If you liked *The Help*, you might enjoy...

***Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen**

It's the classic story of the kid who runs away to the circus. But Jacob, whose parents are killed in a car accident just before he graduates from vet school, runs into more than just clowns and juggling when he finds himself on a train with a traveling show in the 1920s. Gruen's fast-paced writing keeps the reader engaged in the love and madness of her unique characters, and the story of devotion she unveils is not to be missed.

Dancing Goats

Kiersten Wones

Back in the 1500's, a couple of Ethiopian shepherds were letting their goats graze on some berries one day when they noticed something very odd. The goats seemed to be *dancing*. I like to imagine how this conversation went:

"Hey, Kaldi, what's ole Billy doing over there?"

"Looks like he might be trying to dougie or something . . ."

They soon figured out that the berries were the source of their herd's apparent wild side and began to spread the news. Monks began eating the berries for a renewed source of energy during prayer. Eventually the berries traveled to Yemen and then to Turkey where someone had the idea to roast them over the fire and steep them in water: the first brewed cup of coffee.

I work in a box—a ten-by-six foot box (think over-sized elevator)—in the East Alabama Medical Center. I sit on a hard wooden stool for hours a day, greeting every face with a smile. Some might say I'm a barista. I might say I'm a therapist, guiding patients and their families, nurses and doctors and secretaries alike through the hardships of hospital life with their own personalized cups of specialty coffee.

Like I said, I greet every customer with a smile. It's up to them, however, to determine the actual amount of happiness contained in that smile. For my regulars, I put on the smile I'd wear for my long-lost sister, if I had one. For others, though, the smile can quickly turn to plastic.

"You got anything here that don't have coffee in it? I don't like coffee." She stares at the menu, perplexed by the piles of foreign words—*latte, espresso, mocha*.

"Then why would you come to a coffee shop?" is what I don't say. Instead, I begin, "Let's start with the most important question. Do you want something hot, or something cold?"

Blank stare. It's like someone took one of those cheap pink pencil erasers and scrubbed at her eyes. "It's about a hundred degrees outside," I suggest. "How about something to cool you down?"

"I'll be back," she says, scurrying away as if I'd threatened to dump a pot of hot coffee on her if she gave the wrong answer.

Coffee is the second most-sold product in the world—behind oil, of course. It makes sense: gas for our cars, gas for our minds. That's no exaggeration, either. Some of my

regulars would function without coffee as badly as their pick-up trucks without gasoline. The next girl to rush up to the counter is one of these. She's a familiar face; I don't know her name, but I know her drink order, which is what counts. "16 ounce caramel frap, add chocolate. Lots of whip." I love customers who actually know what they want; I greet her with a long-lost-sister smile.

She leaves with her frappe and Blank Stare comes creeping back around the corner. I sigh. I'd rather park my ass on a cheap wooden stool than explain coffee to one.

"What can I get for you?"

"I want what she had," she says, pointing at caramel-frap-add-chocolate-lots-of-whip as she retreats.

"Just to warn you—it has coffee in it. You said you didn't like coffee, right?"

The thing about coffee is, it's always been cool. It probably didn't matter to this girl whether she liked the drink or not; maybe it was enough just to carry it around, take a couple sips, and throw it away. It's said that coffee is an "acquired taste." But why suffer through the bitterness, through the hassle of six creamers and six packs of Splenda in one cup just to "acquire" the taste? Be-

cause coffee is *in*—and it always has been. As Gertrude Stein put it, “It’s a lot more than a drink, it’s something *happening*.”

In fact, in 1675, coffee was so “happening” that the British monarchy feared that those who met in coffeehouses were planning the “Defamation of His Majesty’s Government.” They issued a declaration to “suppress” them, but the law lasted all of sixteen days and was revoked due to widespread citizen protest. Alexander Pope was soon writing that coffee was the drink that “makes politicians wise,” and, several decades later,

it was declared the national drink of the colonized United States in protest over the exorbitant tea tax imposed by the British.

Blank Stare probably has no idea the historical weight of the \$4.31 drink she is eagerly awaiting, but she knows she wants to be a part of the movement, the “happening.” Nonetheless, I cringe with my back towards her as I blend up a frappe, imagining what her face might look like when she sips at her coffee-laden drink. I imagine she might taste it, look at me in disgust, and toss it in the trashcan. It has been

done before. I decorate the frappe like it’s a Christmas tree, chocolate and caramel splashed up the sides of the cup and over the mound of snowy whipped cream. Her face brightens and she scurries away again, drink in hand.

I like to think some momentous change came over her that day. Maybe she rounded the corner and took a sip and felt the elation, that first goat’s dance surging through her veins. Maybe she tasted that coffee and her disgust taught her a lesson: not everything topped with whipped cream and caramel and chocolate is sweet



The Steps by Dana Stuckey

on the inside.

Fortunately, not every customer wears a blank stare. There is the occasional blonde who begs to know where the menu is despite its being inches from her face, but she is balanced out by the new, first-time father who orders “two of the largest, strongest coffees” I have. There’s also Pat—the one customer whose name I actually know—who gave me a hug last year when I left for Christmas break. There’s caramel-white-chocolate-mocha, who only orders a drink when I’m working because she says I make them the best.

This is not to say sitting in a ten-by-six foot box all day does not get boring. I must confess, if J. Alfred Prufrock had had six or seven hours a day to sit on my cheap wooden stool and mull it over, even he might have had enough time to talk himself out of confessing his crush on that girl. Alas, *that is not what I meant*, she said to him, with eyes as emotionless as the Blank Stare, ordering frappes even though she doesn’t like coffee. She took a drink of his confession, closed her eyes in disgust and threw it in the trashcan. *That is not what I meant at all.*

Like Alfred, I “have measured out my life in coffee spoons,” quite literally. I am one of 20 million people worldwide employed in the coffee business. I measure

out my life in spoonfuls: bitter spoonfuls of Blank Stares and cheap wooden stools; sweet spoonfuls like my most loyal, daily cookie customer who told me the other day that he and I are “practically family.” It’s the sweet tastes that usually outdo the bitter ones. When non-fat-caramel-macchiato-extra-hot-with-whip arrives at the counter looking like day-old espresso—which, once brewed, begins to lose its flavor after about thirty

seconds—I get the chance to cheer her up.

You might say I’m a barista. I might say I’m a therapist; as I steam the milk her face lights up at the smell of espresso and caramel with the grin of a dancing goat. What kind of therapy works its magic in the 22 seconds it takes to pull a shot of espresso? Only the aromatherapy of holding your favorite drink in your hand, and dancing.

Morning

Slow time rebuked my heart and hopeful will
through flooded night. I dreamed that you appeared,
then I awoke, but it was raining still.

The darkness drowns the stars but not the chill;
I’m lost, a sinking ship that you once steered.
Slow time rebuked my heart and hopeful will.

And I in lamentation tried to kill
the phantom grief who bleak before me leered,
then I awoke, but it was raining still.

My lips were poised to drink your breath and fill
my soul, but your sweet face before me smeared
while time rebuked my heart and hopeful will.

I fought that blazing demon blind until
he bared my eyes to simple truths I’d feared
then I awoke, but it was raining still.

Though all my soul I poured aloft to will
my love return if but the day had cleared,
slow time rebuked my heart and hopeful will,
and I awoke, but it was raining still.

—Susan Matassa



Sunset by Miranda Pope



Right Round by Andrew Whited



The Greatest Place on Earth by Dana Stuckey

Normal

Mathew Pollock

Fiction

"Take care of your little brother, James." As Mommy left, the front door clicking shut behind her, I slowly turned toward Christian. The deserted house was silent around us.

Looking at my brother, once more I was stricken with confusion. I didn't understand. I never had. His mutations, the face that had all its bits and pieces in the wrong places, made me pity him. Sometimes, I was even disgusted by him. How could Mommy and Daddy, normal like me, look at him with such love? They called him their precious angel, their perfect boy, even though he looked nothing like them. He looked nothing like any of us. Tonight I would fix things, though. Tonight I would make everything better.

Crooking a finger in his direction, I turned and walked upstairs, headed for my room. Turning toward my brother, I made sure to plaster a coaxing smile onto my face. As the curiosity overwhelmed him, Christian followed slowly, cautiously. When I pulled him through the door and bound him to my bedposts with a thick length of rope, he struggled. He was strong. I was stronger. When I pulled the scalpel from under my bed and went into the bathroom to sterilize it, just like Daddy always did, Chris began to whimper. I

ignored him, returning to his side. The rope was tight, and I had work to do. This was no time for horseplay.

Time passed. Every so often, the grandfather clock in the hall would emit a sonorous tone to mark the hour. I was focused on making neat, perfect incisions, so I didn't pay attention. Eventually, though, long after the moon had set, I was through. Squeezing the last few drops of superglue from its tube, using it like Mommy always did with our boo-boos, I resealed all my cuts. Only then did I step back to examine my masterpiece. I had done well – really well. In fact, Chris looked perfect.

Untying my patient at long last, I allowed him to stand. Uncertainly, my brother rubbed his chafing wrists and cast his glance about

the room. Gently, I nudged him toward my mirror. First he stared. Then he smiled. He saw what I'd done, and he was satisfied. The mouth that smiled back at him, in the mirror, held only eight teeth, carved into jagged spires. One eye socket held a bloodshot, lacerated orb, the other was empty. One ear had been sawed off entirely, the other was sharpened to a point. His upper lip was ragged and bloody, and his nostrils were bared for the world to see. Best of all, I had sliced every abhorrent freckle from his face.

Flexing seven bloody fingers, Chris laughed into the mirror. His scarred face wrinkled in a bizarre attempt to display his humor. He finally looked like Mommy and Daddy and me. He was finally normal.



Miranda Pope

(Flash)Back of the Magazine

We're excited to present you with the brand new (Flash)Back of the Magazine section. Well, not really brand new; everything in this section was run in the early editions of the magazine. It is, however, the first time we've had this section. The Circle has changed quite a bit since its inaugural issue in 1974, and the below interview with Tom Botsford, who pioneered The Circle, was the opening piece in the magazine's first edition.

JOHN Q.: Yes, you did. But, remember, you told the politicians that The Circle would be a Playboy without the pictures! My God, in places, it's more like a Reader's Digest without the jokes. They're not going to be too happy with such exaggeration, you know. But I've already said too much...

JOHN Q.: As you requested, I read through the materials for the first issue of The Auburn Circle and have a report. Put on your tough hide and brace yourself.

tative sampling," and I can tell already you don't want to hear the verdict.

T.B.: You always say too much, John Q. Public. While industrious citizens do their damndest to pull something off...

T.B.: Did you consult a representative sampling of the University community? You know – an average student, an exceptional student, a campus administrator, a normal professor, an English professor, a clergyman, a freak, a football fanatic, a journalist, a student politician, a poet?

T.B.: Certainly I do. Let's have it.

JOHN Q.: Thank you, Tricky. You have indeed pulled something off. But stop feeling sorry for yourself and answer the first question. Mr. Average Student wants to know what in the hell this magazine is supposed to accomplish. He says The Plainsman and WEGL keep him informed, football and concerts keep him entertained, and textbooks keep him depressed. Now, what void will The Circle fill?

JOHN Q.: You call a bunch like that representative? Especially the list you gave me! How do you expect to get honest opinions from seven of your good friends and four recipients of your good money? No sir, Mr. Editor, I consulted my own "representative sampling," and I can tell already you don't want to hear the verdict.

JOHN Q.: Not yet. Actually the report is not complete. A few of our representatives have questions for you. If you can pussyfoot around on these like you and co-founder Jimmy Blake did with the questions of the Student Senate Budget and Finance Committee, you might save The Circle. Ready?

T.B.: Hold it a minute. Jimmy and I have never pussyfooted around on anything. We obviously satisfied the student senators. We got the money to print this first issue, didn't we?

T.B.: ah...

John Q.: Start pussyfootin'.

T.B.: All right, it's supposed to inform, entertain, and maybe

even depress the reader a bit—but in a different way from the other publications and activities you mentioned. Let's look at it from the perspective of a community writer. In *The Circle* context, he has more room to move, certainly greater stylistic freedom, a chance to pursue matters many copy inches beyond the editorial-feature story slot. And because he has more time to think and revise than, say, a *Plainsman* reporter does, he is expected to write better. His article, story, or poem has to pass review by members of our board of editors. So we've instituted a workshop of sorts, not only for writers but also for photographers and artists.

JOHN Q.: The Average Student thinks all that is fine and maybe a bit pompous. But he says he can find more professional material, for less than a dollar, on the newsstand.

T.B.: Much more professional, certainly. But more immediately applicable to our community and state, not always. We have localized some of our approaches. Mr. Little, for example, in his fine article on endangered species, primarily discusses the problem as it concerns us here in Alabama. You can't buy that on the newsstand. And our interviewing team—I'm proud of them—caught former governor Folsom in a sassy mood, talking about

regional matters, even campus issues like women's dorm restrictions. But the most important advantage for Mr. Average Student lies in the easy accessibility of most of our contributors. What Big Jim Folsom says about state legislators applies to us, too. You can find Circle people grooving around Auburn and Opelika anytime. If you don't like what they write, if you want to debate them on the concourse, they're merely a telephone call away. The staff believes any exchange of opinions, heated or not, complements a University education and—besides—is just plain fun.

JOHN Q.: Pretty good pussy-footin'. But will it keep the customer satisfied?

T.B.: Tell him the Circle will look good on his coffee table. And it's free.

JOHN Q.: Ah, yes, snob appeal. Now let's move on to the English professor.

T.B.: God help us. Who is he?

JOHN Q.: The only one—other than the gentleman in your pay—who would read it. The rarefied air on the ninth floor, by the way, made my visit somewhat uncomfortable. You should really give me credit for going to so much trouble, all to spare you a little future shock.

T.B.: Muckraker. But tell me what the professor said.

JOHN Q.: I've forgotten all of it except one word—"Phillippinism."

T.B.: No! You must mean something concerning Philistines.

JOHN Q.: That's what he called the lot of you.

T.B.: (after muttering something) Why don't we hear from the next one? Tell me, if you don't mind, what the Reverend Rod Sinclair said about *The Circle*.

JOHN Q.: I told you I didn't use your list. My clerical representative is the Reverend Elias C. Priggs of Barbour county. He has a son at Auburn and is well known among footwashing Baptists for his earnest, rustic appeal.

T.B.: I suppose he was disappointed.

JOHN Q.: Disappointed? Hell, he put a hex on you all. Big Jim's profanity, Ayn Rand's selfishness, Jack Mountain's heresy...

T.B.: Pray for open minds. Did you tell him that many of our staff members are devout Christians who believe the Faith healthiest when it transcends concern over petty mores and confronts skepticism in the raw...

JOHN Q.: Yes, I told him, and he put a hex on me, too.

T.B.: That sort of totalitarianism eats on my soul. The Circle, if it survives, will eventually embrace the full spectrum of thought—religious, political, cultural. We welcome controversy. We love it. Our ultimate goal is to establish a forum for the vigorous exchange of opinions. So we look forward to letters to the editor and to controversy breaking out like pimples all over the campus.

JOHN Q.: Pimples?

T.B.: Yes, pimples. But the energy spent resolving controversy—or, at least, bringing it out in the open—will drain the pus, the bile, the bad

temper, from our system and make for clearer thinking, a sounder mental complexion.

JOHN Q.: You're crazy.

T.B.: You tell the Reverend that we thank God for sparing us a life of conformity, of "one way" this and "one way" that. And tell him we will even accept one of his manuscripts if it's readable. You see, each writer speaks only for himself, not for the staff or our publisher, the Board of Student Communications.

JOHN Q.: If humanity ever worships the God of controversy, you could go into the

ministry and administer the new opiate.

T.B.: Which poet did you consult?

JOHN Q.: Two of them: Rod McKuen and one who wishes to remain anonymous.

T.B.: Oh, how did Rod react to the poetry of his cousin, Elrod of Pine Sap, Arkansas?

John Q.: He loved Elrod's poetry, said he must meet Elrod's pussycat sometime. But the anonymous poet was the real stickler. After reading all of the poems, he nearly lost consciousness, muttering for hours: "I must be polite, I



Samford Lawn from 1946 to 2011 by Jeffrey Bolan
(Special thanks to Auburn University Library Special Collections and Archives)

should be polite..."

T.B.: Well, that wasn't very polite...

JOHN Q.: Can you blame him? Don't you think he and every other poet, and every poetry teacher as well, tire of feigning polite interest in the verse of Consciousness III, the verse of the Silent Majority, the rhymes of Mr. Everybody? Mr. Allen Tate says, "There is nothing so presumptuous as poetry." So why don't you leave presumption to those who have earned the right, through excellence, to presume? Hugh Hefner doesn't publish poetry. He knows that most people hate poetry and that the few who love it are generally vicious critics who think an aspiring poet should shut himself up in an attic for years until he writes a good poem. Your workshop theory fails to move these turnips. They won't bleed a bit.

T.B.: The Circle is not for turnips. Although the poetry is not in my department, I'll try to illustrate in musical terms. You know I listen to jazz and consequently admire the spunk of those who dare to defy every rule in the book of so-called good taste to express themselves. We hear plenty of bad jazz as a result. But we also hear some very excellent jazz that wouldn't be around today if some turnip had sent Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane to the woodshed. This magazine, to speak bluntly, will be a poet-

ic weed garden. Occasionally, however, some beautiful wild flower might appear. For what it's worth, the poems in this issue passed review by a committee consisting of one English teacher, two English graduate students, one English undergraduate, and one far out photographer. We did the best we could.

JOHN Q.: Why don't you stop trying to speak metaphorically. You're dismal.

T.B.: Was I speaking metaphorically? Gee...

JOHN Q.: Just get ready for the turnips. In the meantime, what do you have to say to Fred Freak who expected a right on Rolling Stone local full of far-out affectations and dopey put-ons?

T.B.: We owe Fred an apology. A quasi-underground thing, we discovered, is out of our league. We aren't cosmic enough for that. But we hope to feature a story on the Duane Allman tradition in our next issue. For that, we plan to send a couple of reporters to Macon, Georgia, cradle of the new Southern music.

JOHN Q.: Fred will give you another chance. And so will our representative of the exceptional students. In fact, he's volunteered to help pull The Circle up to exceptional standards. How can he contribute?

T.B.: Just have him contact any member of the board of editors...By the way, do you hear that shouting and pounding at the back door? It's been worrying me for the duration of the interview.

JOHN Q.: I thought you knew about the War Eagle mob. They're after the blood of one of your writers, Jimmy Weldon. His review of two Auburn football books infuriated them.

T.B.: Maybe if I invite them inside they'll understand that Weldon loves football as much as they do. A review, however, must point to weaknesses, not just offer panegyrics to please a friend or reinforce public opinion. Auburn's tradition of gridiron excellence, the work of men like Coach Jordan and Jeff Beard, deserves the best. Weldon thinks David Housel could offer that someday. I don't understand why they're so upset.

JOHN Q.: If you invite them in, I'll leave.

T.B.: Just tell them, if you will, that Weldon doesn't live here and that I didn't write the review.

JOHN Q.: Sure. I have to go in a minute anyhow. But first, the final verdict. I've taken all your pussyfootin' into consideration...

T.B.: Let's have the final verdict.



Smith Hall from the 1930s to 2011 by Jeffrey Bolan
(Special thanks to Auburn University Library Special Collections and Archives)

Right Under Your Nose

Cocaine Comes to Auburn

By Amy Dawes (Fall 1979)

This 1979 Circle article surveys the cocaine scene in Auburn. Dawes' piece is still relevant to the social and cultural climate at Auburn University in 2011, the 30th year of the highly scrutinized War on Drugs.

Spread out before me is a diverse collection of cocaine paraphernalia that includes colorful boxes, vials, scales, ornate spoons, mirrors, and tubes for snorting the finely chopped white powder. I am standing in front of the "cocaine case" in the Black Doggs head shop in the back of Cheap Thrills record store in downtown Auburn. "Do you sell very much of this stuff?" I ask the woman. "Sure," she says, "cocaine use is very common in Auburn."

Cocaine, the central-nervous system stimulant derived from the leaves of the coca plant, has been available in Auburn since approximately 1972, when there was a resurgence in the demand for the drug around the country, but never has it been so readily available and as widely used as it is today. By now all of America is aware of cocaine's popularity among jet-setters, rock stars, and the newly rich, but it is not as well-known that cocaine has actually become the most widely preferred, socially

acceptable, and frequently used (after marijuana) illegal drug in this town and in the nation.

Because it is a fact that more people are making recreational drugs a part of their lifestyle and thus the chances are increasingly good that a member of the University community will find himself in a situation where cocaine is offered to him, The Circle has conducted research and interviews in an effort to bring information about the controversial drug to the people, as well as to relate the personal experience and advice of those who have been involved with the drug. In order to protect our sources, the students interviewed will be referred to by pseudonyms.

Cocaine is a "pleasure drug" that is increasingly mentioned in the same sentence as alcohol and marijuana as a "safe" drug because moderate use in a social context does not produce side effects harmful enough to deter the user. The most prohibitive factor in cocaine use is the price. Other than that, the possible deterrents to "social snorting" (analogous to social drinking) are insomnia, weight loss, irritability, the physical

exhaustion and depression experienced when "coming down," and damage to the nasal mucous membranes and cartilage.

When snorted, cocaine produces a numbing of the nose and throat followed by anything from mild euphoria to a feeling of extreme physical and mental exultation which may last from thirty minutes to an hour, depending on the dose and purity of the cocaine. Students who were interviewed tended to be vague in their description of the drug's pleasure-giving effects, but all were in agreement that it was "fun" and that there was "no other high like it." One woman said it made her feel like "laughing, dancing, and staying up all night," another, "that you can do anything." The most articulate description was received from someone who was cocaine-intoxicated at the time, and who was exhibiting such symptoms of an over-stimulated central nervous system as grinding his teeth and breathing very rapidly. The subject, Alan, was in infectious, high spirits.

"I first used cocaine at a party," he said. "When you go to a party you go looking for a good time, right? Well, when you do cocaine it's usually guaranteed. You don't have to look for a good time; you are a good time. You are fun, you are a

party. You walk into a group of people and you're lit up like a neon light. You're so happy you just effuse happiness, and it makes you fun to be around. I don't need to escape—that's not why I would do a drug—I like to socialize, and cocaine lets me get a huge amount of enjoyment from myself and my friends."

How were Alan's perceptions altered by being under the influence of cocaine?

"It's not an altered state in the psychedelic sense. With coke, your perceptions are not unreal, just pleasurable heightened to where the world is more stimulating and you have so much energy and you feel so glad to be alive. If there's anything unreal about it, it's just that things seem better and more exciting than they really are."

What about coming down?

"Well, you know it's going to happen, and you want to put it off—and that's where the bad part can come in. If there's any more coke around you're going to snort it, and you can end up spending about \$100, which makes coming to earth even worse, because you end up kicking yourself."

Coming down is the unavoidable aftermath of the cocaine experience. "The higher you go, the lower you go," said a woman interviewed. During the interviews there were frequent references to the "cocaine blues" and the mental and physi-

cal fatigue and depression associated with the body's performance after operating in overdrive.

In its physiological effects on the body, cocaine increases the heartbeat, speeds up the breathing, and raises the body temperature. It also works on the cardiovascular system causing constriction of certain blood vessels. With larger doses, and especially when injected, cocaine can produce headaches, rapid and weak pulse, hyperventilation, cold sweat, nausea, tremors, convulsions, unconsciousness, and even death. Injection is a much less common method of cocaine consumption than snorting, but it is not unknown in Auburn and had been used by two of the students interviewed. The cocaine is reduced to liquid form and injected into the vein with a hypodermic needle. In this method, the drug rushes straight to the pleasure center of the brain, and while its effects are much shorter-lived (less than five minutes) they are infinitely more powerful. Interviewees described the sensation as "a train rushing through your veins," "jumping out of an airplane," and "better than orgasm." Author William Burroughs has written of mainline injection in *Naked Lunch* that "it hits you right in the brain, activating centers of pure pleasure...The c-charged brain is a berserk pinball machine, flashing blue and pink lights

in electric orgasm."

Injection of any substance into the veins is extremely dangerous and places a great strain on the circulatory system and the heart. It also leads to a more intense desire to use cocaine and is strongly discouraged by those with experience, who report that the body can have violent and frightening reactions to injection.

As cocaine changes hands, dealers mix it with other substances to give it more volume and weight and to increase their profits. Some of these substances, called adulterants, are fatal when injected, and some may produce undesirable side effects when snorted. The most commonly used adulterants include a mild baby laxative called mannite, sugar such as lactose and dextrose, a vitamin B compound called inositol, speed hits like Methamphetamine, Benzedrine and Dexedrine which are mixed with cocaine to increase the "lift," and local anesthetics like procaine which have a numbing effect on the face.

"A lot of the blacks come in here wanting the procaine," says the woman at Black Doggs. She pulls a cardboard-encased vial of white powder from under the counter. The package is red and white and it says "Rock crystal." \$4.95.

"Procaine?" I ask. She nods.

"They mix this stuff with cocaine, and it makes your

nose numb. Makes people think they're getting really good cocaine. It doesn't get you high though. We sell it as incense." I notice that the package says: Warning—Not For Drug Use. The woman says she has a suspicion that some people try to sell cocaine as cocaine to novice users. She adds that she sells about equal amounts of cocaine and marijuana paraphernalia. "The funny thing is that you can pretty much tell when there's coke in town by this case. When coke comes to town, woosh!" She sweeps her arm across the case. "It's just a business to me. I took the paraphernalia out of the window to ap-

pease the cops. I know they don't like us being here, but there's nothing they can do about it."

She is right, according to Police Chief Barney Harding, who confirms that drug paraphernalia is technically off-limits to police as evidence unless it has been used and contains residue that can be detected in a laboratory. Harding, who was recently involved in the arrest of seventeen Auburn residents on drug charges, eight to ten of them involving cocaine use, says that the drug is used "pretty freely" in Auburn. He has no idea as to what percentage of students may have tried cocaine, and

he says that, of the arrests he has made on cocaine-related charges since taking office a year and a half ago, all were for dealing and none just for possession, which he says is "no indicator." Harding says he knew the drug was in town when he took office, but that its availability is higher now than it has been in the past. He says it is in pretty common usage, especially among students, and that next to marijuana it is the most prevalent form of drug use. Harding would not give any information as to where the cocaine in town was coming from, but he was happy to explain the law as it applies to cocaine use.



Ross Hall from the 1950s to 2011 by Jeffrey Bolan
(Special thanks to Auburn University Library Special Collections and Archives)

Cocaine is classified under the Controlled Substance Act along with Qualudes, marijuana, heroin, morphine, etc. Thus it is still a narcotic under the law. The first offense of possession of under a gram of cocaine is a misdemeanor resulting in a fine and/or imprisonment of under a year. The second offense of the same, or the first offense following conviction for possession of any other controlled substance, including marijuana, is a felony carrying a penalty of two to fifteen years imprisonment. Dealing is a felony on the first offense and is not identified by any specific amount over

a gram but by "reason to believe."

"When you go out into the world with your college degree, a felony conviction closes doors," says Chief Harding. "It can mean the difference between being a pharmacist or veterinarian or being a service station attendant. Between living a life of challenge and excitement and a mere existence. That's why I hate to see these kids doing these things just for thrills, because of what they're doing to their lives."

Harding adds that he is against marijuana legalization because he considers the current situation "positive

proof" that the widespread use of that drug has led to the use of cocaine. "The cocaine user of today is the marijuana user of yesterday," said Harding.

Cocaine users interviewed invariably said that cocaine was not the first drug they had ever used. The general consensus seemed to be not that the use of marijuana compulsively led to the use of cocaine, but that it placed them in a social context where they were more likely to encounter cocaine and made them less resistant to experimenting. Cocaine is usually first encountered in a small gathering in a private



Cater Hall from 1946 to 2011 by Jeffrey Bolan
(Special thanks to Auburn University Library Special Collections and Archives)

home, and reasons for trying it included "I had heard it was safe and a lot of fun," "someone offered it to me and I thought, why not?," "I had heard good things about it," "a friend of mine told me it was the most pure and natural drug you could do," and "I just wanted to catch a buzz."

For some, part of the drug's initial lure was its reputation for enhancing the sex act. According to one man, "it does increase sexual desires on my part and it seems to enhance sex a lot," but several others were not so sure that the drug was a real aphrodisiac, and one woman said that sex was the furthest thing from her mind when she was cocaine-intoxicated.

Several students reported using cocaine as a study aid because it "keeps you up" and it seems to accelerate mental activity.

The frequency of cocaine use varies: some are heavily drawn to the experience and will do the drug consistently whenever they can afford it; others use it only on infrequent occasions to brighten an evening or afternoon.

How are college students able to afford cocaine in the first place? For most, the first time is on a friend. After that, the money may come from paychecks, allowance, or any surplus cash available. A gram of cocaine runs in the neighborhood of \$100, but the \$25 quarter-gram is a commonly purchased quantity that is good for

about one "party." After that, the regular user is usually someone who sells a little cocaine in order to obtain it. This was the case for Greg, who says he "first got started at Auburn, last year, all because someone offered me a chance to sell it. The people who wanted it came to me, and it was done all in one day. The money got me through the quarter. It could have turned out to be big money if I'd never touched it, but it had a certain mystique about it..." (Cocaine users report a common fascination with chopping and cutting the expensive white powder.)

The most common quantity that is dealt in Auburn is a quarter-ounce (7-grams) that is usually obtained for \$500 and can be sold for \$700, but most dealers end up consuming the profits, and then some, because "once you start partying on it—watch out. It's depressing coming down, and as soon as you do a line you're going to want another line. You keep trying to reach something, and what you do never seems to satisfy it."

Although cocaine is not a physically addicting drug in the sense that heroin and morphine are, and discontinuing its use is mainly a matter of making the decision and sticking to it, the psychological addiction to the drug can be a powerful force for some people and may lead to abuse of the drug to the point that it interferes with

their health, economic situation, or social adjustment.

"I wouldn't recommend cocaine use to anyone," said Greg, who was once heavily involved with the drug. "It is more dangerous than marijuana because you get very drawn into it. It's a real mental trip, and even if you don't spend that much time actually high on the drug, it becomes the center of your life and you never get anything else done. When you get involved with coke, other things don't matter anymore—schoolwork especially. The money? It always blew my mind how much money was spent on cocaine, but at the time your values are rearranged, and you think in different terms." One woman who was interviewed reported practically giving away her stereo system and record collection so that she could buy cocaine, and those interviewed who had been heavily involved with the drug spoke of the experience with discomfort and hesitation, as though it were unpleasant to remember. "I think all the time I spent high on coke was time wasted," said Greg. "I know now that it's not a good thing."

All of those interviewed reported that cocaine use was socially acceptable among their peers, but said that it was not necessarily a course of prestige. "You just don't go around talking about it," says Debra. "You don't want people pointing you out as someone who

does cocaine," said Greg. Why is it, then, that bands who play Eric Clapton's "Cocaine" invariably draw roars of approval from the crowds in clubs and concert halls? "It's one thing to admit it in a crowd," said Debra, "but another to people you sit in class with."

Discretion is a major part of the game, and students felt that if one was careful and discreet, the chances of getting busted in Auburn simply for possession were slim. (None of them were exactly aware of how the law treated possession, nor were they particularly well informed about the chemical effects of cocaine on the body. Overdose was of little concern to the users, although cocaine-related deaths have been known to occur.)

Cocaine use is glorified in rock music, and is closely associated with musicians and entertainers who often serve as cultural beacons for the college student, but this has had surprisingly little to do with the drug's attraction, according to those interviewed. It was the experience itself, and not the aura surrounding it that made cocaine users out of them. However, one woman speculated that "people who are heavily into Studio 54 and disco might do the drug just to be glamorous."

Why is it that cocaine use, which was practically unheard-of in the Sixties, has become so popular in the late Seventies?

Use of a specific drug usually takes root in a fringe subculture of society and then proceeds to integrate itself into the larger body. It was the disco subculture that emerged and practically engulfed America over the past five years, bringing to popular culture a sudden shift from the mellow to the upbeat, with an emphasis on high energy, glamour, sex, the exotic, and the trappings

of affluence. In accordance, cocaine is a high-energy drug and a very expensive pleasure.

College students have always been a subculture in themselves, however, and the consensus among those interviewed is that cocaine is simply a drug that is being "rediscovered." As several of them put it, "there's always going to be something."

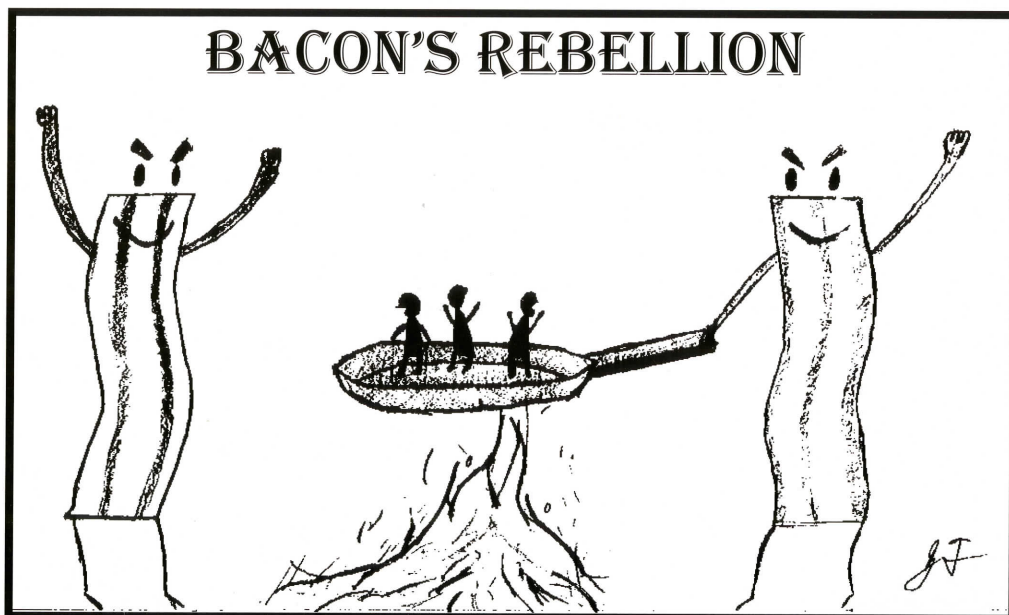


HP Powell on the steps of Langdon Hall, 1897 to 2011 by Jeffrey Bolan
(Special thanks to Auburn University Library Special Collections and Archives)



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